



THE UK'S NO.1 MULTIFORMAT GAMES MAG

GAMES MASTER



— EXCLUSIVE ACCESS! —

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THE UK'S NO.1 MULTIFORMAT GAMES MAG GAMES MASTER

Issue 304 / June 2016

“An exclusive first peek at one of 2016’s biggest hits”

Don't you just love it when a great game sneaks up on you? That's exactly what happened this month, with the phenomenally gorgeous-looking Dishonored 2. We knew it existed before now, but with an exclusive peek behind the curtains over at Arkane Studios comes a heady appreciation for what will be one of 2016's biggest hits.

The series is famous for building a world which really resonates, and the new location of Karnaca looks a worthy successor to Dunwall. The sun-kissed new environ is shaping up to be a prime digital destination for some essential videogame escapism.

Omedetou, by the way, for picking up an issue packed with specially baked JRPG goodness. Alongside big hitters such as Mafia III and Nioh, we've taken an up close look at the next year of Japan-flavoured gaming. From Final Fantasy XV to the beautiful Am Setsuna, there's plenty to sink your eye globes into.

And did someone say Uncharted 4 review? Yes, I did, just now. Head to p64 and get it in your face.

Enjoy your GM!



Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman - Editor

GET MORE FROM YOUR GM!



Online at www.gamesradar.com/gamesmaster



...or subscribe. See p92 for details.



EDITOR'S CHOICE
MY TOP PICKS THIS ISSUE



Have you spotted the epic Dark Souls III poster with our print edition? See more right here: <http://bit.ly/gmbnstore>



32 Our previews section gets an injection of Japanese role playing this ish. Nippon over there right now!



64 The charmer's back, and with his long awaited return comes a must-read score.



46 DISHONORED 2 Much like our cover, Dishonored 2 has us split down the middle. Do we play as rat-summoning, teleporting Corvo Attano, or the tentacle-wielding, hypnotising Emily Kaldwin? Decisions, decisions!

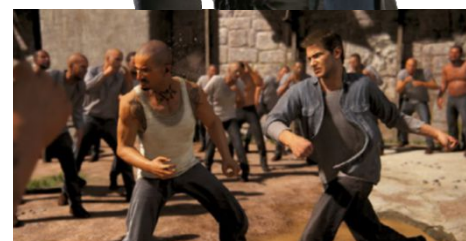
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- 72 FIRE EMBLEM FATES** Matt spends dozens of hours peering into his 3DS in search of love. It's not in there, Matt. It's not in there.
- 77 RATCHET & CLANK** Read all about how we used the Groovitron weapon to make enemies dance at gunpoint.
- 78 ALIENATION** Destiny meets Resogun? It's more likely than you might think - and it comes with hordes of alien bugs.

GM Regulars

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- 10 UPFRONT** Nintendo stealth-unveiled its next console to undeserving investors. The only thing we invest is emotion.
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- 90 CULTUREMASTER** What happens when you combine VR with actual rollercoasters and zombies? A whole lot of screaming.

Team GM

Meet The Magazine's Makers!



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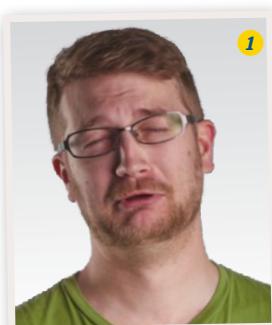
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THE MOST DEDICATED TEAM IN THE BUSINESS

A real family unit. That's what Team GM is. Mainly because, as in Mafia III, there's the constant threat of sleeping with the fishes should they miss deadline. And those fishes are real duvet-hoggers.



Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman

The team got a whiff of what it's like to sit in the editor's chair this month, as Matt's daily To Do list leaked online. Spotting items such as 'Undermine Robin' and 'Shoot Down Ben's Puns' worked wonders for mag morale.

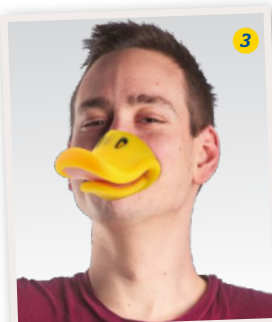
What would your Mafia name be?
 Matt 'The Sak Attack' Gilman



Sam Freeman

It's with a heavy heart that we bid our man of art farewell this issue, as he's off to pastures new. Well, to Bristol at least. Expect our non-photoshopped hairstyles and plague-marked visages to come at you in full force from next ish...

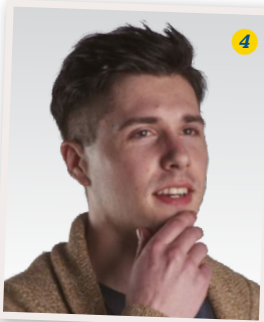
What would your Mafia name be?
 Sammy The 'Shopper



Robin Valentine

Given that Robin spent an inordinate amount of time this issue watching a bunch of baby geese being hatched on the roof of Bioware HQ (this is a thing that actually happened), we've re-dubbed him Mr Ganderson. We guess technically it is game watching?

What would your Mafia name be?
 'Big Boy' Bobby Valentine



Ben Griffin

The Team GM newcomer fell foul of editor Matt this month when he misappropriated the hallowed Successful Deadline Day bell in order to celebrate mild puns. Said bell how now been rendered inert via the cunning use of tape and a sachet of condiment.

What would your Mafia name be?
 Benny The Bell



SFV's core fighting is superb, but a lack of features and modes make the game feel strangely unfinished.



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Back to the future

Younger generations will probably think VR is a new phenomena, but they weren't around for the Virtual Boy. I still have mine, boxed and in mint working condition. You see, virtual reality is a product of the '80s, but the technology just wasn't there to realise its potential.

Now VR has truly become, well... a reality. Whether its Vive, Rift, or PSVR, this year we'll see whether it becomes a new gaming standard, or the next Kinect or PS Move dust collector.

It's difficult to describe how special it is. As an early adopter of the Oculus (I got a DK2) I've been sold for some time, but how do you convince others? I started with my wife, plugging her into Elite: Dangerous. While she wasn't keen on the subject matter, she was blown away by how immersive it was. Next, I let my son try. Needless to say it was the best thing since he discovered Minecraft. But the toughest audience of all was the grandparents. How do you convince a 65 year old grandad that his time is best spent flying a fictional space ship with a headset on? But when he popped the DK2 on he was soon lost in it, and ended up messing about with it for over an hour.

It proves that the experience, unlike a lot of traditional gaming, isn't restricted by gender, age, or even how much you like or dislike gaming. In my household, VR's brought every generation to the same conclusion - that this is the future.

I have unashamedly pre-ordered the Vive, Rift, and PSVR, and I would encourage any gamer to try it. Give it a go and you will be slapping that pre-order down as fast as you can!

Alex Shute, email

Editor Matt had the opposite reaction to the Rift - after reviewing the launch line-up, and enduring a few bouts of

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Triple-A games are launching incomplete, says Chris

Read through the reviews for Street Fighter V, I'm becoming more aware of an increasingly worrying trend in triple-A games: lack of content at launch. From what I've read, it has no arcade mode, no training/challenge mode and although gameplay-wise is extraordinary, doesn't offer much replay value. I find it bizarre that a major 2016 release, costing roughly £45, has so little content. What's worse is that publishers seem to be ok with selling these missing features later on (or even at launch!) as DLC. With software already expensive, these extra costs always come off to me as unfair.



Vote with your wallet - if you think a game or add-on isn't up to snuff, don't buy it. Another reason not to pre-order!

Don't get me wrong though, some DLC expansions can be great, adding to the original story or improving character rosters. Some of my favourites include the seminal Minerva's Den and Burial At Sea (Bioshock 2 and Bioshock Infinite respectively), and Mario Kart 8's extra Cups. I'm just worried by this pattern I've noticed in recent years. What does team GM think?

Chris Smyth, email

SFV's launch really disappointed us, and while it's had a number of free updates since (including one featuring challenges and tutorials), it still feels like an incomplete package. The problem triple-A publishers are facing in general is that their games are getting more and more expensive to make, often creating these situations of shaky releases and dodgy DLC practices. It may not feel like it, but games are actually cheaper than ever, and that does cause some unfortunate issues. ■

WIN!

Got an opinion? Have even the barest grasp of words and how to put them together? The best letter bags a free mystery game!

*Don't forget to include your postal address and chosen format!



BUG OF THE MONTH



Samuel Hamilton's innocent game of PES2016 led to an impromptu love scene. Götzsche after a move to Arsenal?

Got a screenshot of a bug you've run in to? Send it in!

WISH LIST

What features do you want to see in the new Legend Of Zelda?

That huge open world hinted at in the announcement trailer, and possibly the choice of a male or female Link.

Martin Dixon, @BunnySuicida

For it to have the character of Ocarina Of Time or Wind Waker. Honestly I felt like Skyward Sword was a misstep.

Stanley Cohen, Facebook

I just want it to finally come out!

Andrew, @haloNine

Give me a Zelda where every player can complete the game via an entirely different route, Elder Scrolls-style.

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman, @Gmaniacal

I want a Link/Linkle choice and a more badass feeling than the usual, humble, silent protagonist...

Vaggelis Karpetis, Facebook

I want it to feel like something new, not like an extension of TP or OOT.

Paul Davis, Facebook



Alex's Virtual Boy, still looking good after all these years.

"I FELT OVERWHELMED - SHOULD I GET A WII U, XBOX ONE, OR PS4?"

nausea and having his glasses pushed into his face for hours at a time, he said virtual reality is "no way to play games"! Maybe VR is like Marmite...

Drive safe

I have to be honest - I haven't owned a games console since the Sega Mega Drive, and having lots of little nephews who are fast becoming hardcore gamers I decided maybe it was time I bought one.

Having a look through the options on offer I felt totally overwhelmed! Should I get a Wii U, an Xbox One, or a PS4? The graphics on the games made everything seem so real! But the prices on the games were pretty eye watering too... So having

weighed up all the options and remembering all the hundreds of hours spent playing Sonic The Hedgehog 2 in my room as a child, the console I decided to buy was... another Sega Mega Drive! Now if I can only convince my nephews that I'm not a sad old man I'll be alright!

Owen Hollifield, email

Haha! You're definitely missing out on some amazing experiences on current-gen, though. Like the Mega Drive Collection!

Fantasy star

I write in after hearing the news that Final Fantasy XV has a release date of 30

September, as well as a film, anime series, and, er, a real life car. For once I'm finding myself really interested in Final Fantasy. For some reason the world and combat shown in the trailers is thrilling me, and I feel as I'm getting older (well, maybe 17 isn't that old!), I'm starting to appreciate and be intrigued by games I never thought I'd want to play - No Man's Sky and Overwatch have also caught my eye. I was wondering whether the GM team's taste in games has changed over the years? I'm starting to wonder whether I'm sick or something...

Charlie Ridgwell, email

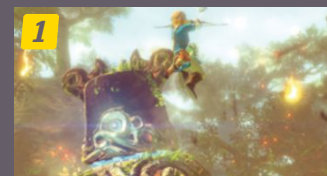
Gaming tastes definitely change over the course of your life - prod ed Robin, for example, grew up with platformers and puzzle games, but these days he craves more story-driven experiences. You've picked some very cool upcoming titles to spread your wings with - write in and let us know what you think of them when you do get a chance to play them! ■



YOUR TOP 5

MOST WANTED

While Nintendo's staying quiet as church mice, you lot couldn't be louder about your love of Link...



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

Format Wii U **ETA** Winter

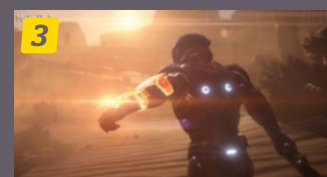
This long-awaited latest entry refuses to budge from the top spot, enjoying its second week at number one.



NO MAN'S SKY

Format PS4, PC **ETA** 24 June

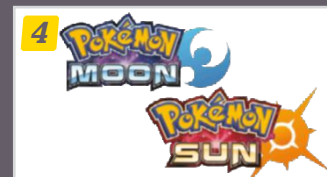
We're so close to blast off time we can practically smell the rocket fuel. Watch out universe, here we come!



MASS EFFECT: ANDROMEDA

Format PS4, XO, PC **ETA** Spring 2017

The Bioware behemoth is back for more tricky moral dilemmas, space magic, and, dare we say it, alien romance...



POKÉMON SUN AND MOON

Format 3DS **ETA** Winter

Looks like you trainers can't wait to catch 'em all all over again in this latest duo of monster-nabbing sequels.



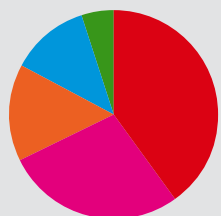
FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE

Format PS4 **ETA** Winter 2017

While there's plenty of FFXV excitement about, it's this retro remake that's really getting series fans going this month.

OFF THE CHART!

The hot topics you've been gabbing about



- 40%** Speculating about the next GTA
- 28%** What you want from the NX controller
- 15%** The best loot you ever found
- 12%** Classic GamesMaster posters
- 05%** Should COD go back to WW2?



📌 Damian Gale's collection of old GamesMaster free gifts is truly impressive - this is what loyal fandom looks like!



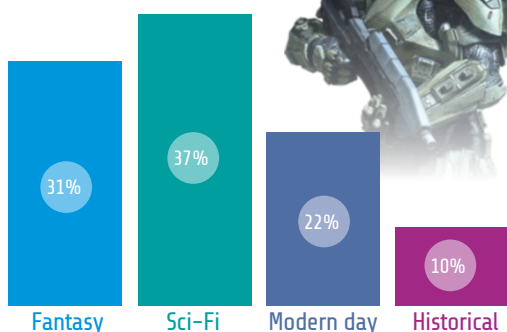
📌 This tasty peanut butter and banana treat is the perfect tribute to Overwatch's Winston - learn how to make your own at Eat Game Live here: <http://bit.ly/gmwinston>



📌 Louise Eckersall's sent us a photo of her ace cosplay of Final Fantasy VI's Terra Branford!

POLL POSITION

What's your favourite kind of videogame setting?



Which is the best Resident Evil game?



SOCIAL GROUSING

Wisdom and weirdness from our bustling social media channels



Sci-fi has some of the poorest representation. I miss games like Singularity.

Thomas, @ordinarymagoo



Surely the final of The X Factor should be decided by a game of Mario Kart on the N64.

Craig Chapman, @CWChap



Trevor Phillips is in The Walking Dead and just as psychotic!

Daniel Reid, Facebook

MANIAC OF THE MONTH!



Been buying GM for a year now and it was all down to a lack of stock of my usual mag. Would never change back now, you guys rock!

ScarsOfViolence, @ScarsOfViolence



The next GTA should have horses instead of cars and cowboys instead of gangsters...

Paul Fox, @FoximusPrime81



RE6 is the best one. No joke - it's just the most fun for me. Plus the best romance story of our time.

Sanjay Pattani, @LeoZeo2



I'm liking Paragon at present, I'll be excited when it's open to all!

Mark Kempself-Smith, Facebook



Been playing Zelda non-stop since seeing the Zelda Symphony last weekend!

Stanley Cohen, Facebook

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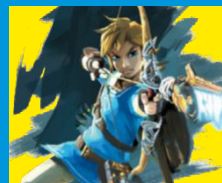
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 PS4™





Nintendo announces its plans for 2016 and beyond - and they're definitely not what we NX-pected...

MEET THE PS4 NEO

Sony's 'PS4.5' is reportedly 4K and will co-exist with PS4

Developers can patch 'Neo mode' into old games, so you can enjoy them at better resolutions and framerates.

WHAT'S THE DEAL?

Three big questions we want answered



Devs cannot run Neo-only servers. How will online work when some players are at 60fps and others at 30?



Games at higher resolutions run at lower framerates. Will there be PC-style graphical options?

14 Control alts



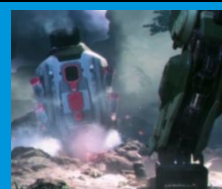
From edible inputs to flying without wings, we take a tour through the world of weird controllers.

18 Re-redemption



Could a Red Dead Redemption sequel be on the horizon? This leaked map suggests so...

21 Fall back



Hop in your mech and pick up... a sword?! We've got the latest info on Titanfall 2

The Burning Question



Are you going to buy the PlayStation Neo?



No
Big mistake by Sony thinking people will pay for another console.
Martin Sadler, Facebook



No
So annoyed they are releasing a new console mid-cycle!
Samuel Hamilton, Facebook

Visit www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster and www.twitter.com/gamesmaster to take part in next issue's burning questions.



A

n extensive barrage of rumours suggest that Sony's new half-step console, code-named 'Neo', will comfortably hit 4K resolution and allow for smoother framerates, with Sony mandating a 1080p minimum pixel count. For the tech heads out there: the Neo's cores are overclocked from 1.6GHz to 2.1GHz (a 31 per cent improvement), and memory bandwidth rises by 24 per cent - equivalent to high-end PC graphics cards. Whereas processor manufacturers AMD re-jigged off-the-shelf parts for the PS4, it's believed the manufacturer's invented brand new tech for this box.

Avoiding fan base segmentation is key. According to leaked documents, developers are prohibited from making Neo-only features and modes, and every PS4 game is required to include a base mode (for use with PS4) and a Neo mode. The eco system remains unchanged, too - elements such as the storefront, PSN IDs, and image capture will be shared across both consoles. All peripherals are to be supported, and saved data is transferable between both, potentially letting you pick up

Expansion Pak boosted the N64's base RAM from 4MB to 8MB, but while it was cheap and largely optional, advances were minor. Balance will prove tricky: for good or bad, Sony's prime directive of parity between consoles restricts how far they can push the Neo hardware.

And it's not only the Japanese giants making moves. Like them, in an attempt to recover from dwindling profit margins driven by a fierce price cut war, Microsoft wants a reason to keep its console on shelves at a high price, and is

"THE NEW MACHINE IS GEARED TOWARDS IMPROVED VISUALS AND PERFORMANCE"

where you left off. The new machine's enhancements are geared towards improved visuals and performance. For instance, although the front-end remains identical, Neo users should see additional options for 4K movies in the marketplace.

Reincarnation station

We can scour history for how - and how not - to introduce hardware revisions. On the one hand you've got Sega's substantial Sega CD and 32X expansions for the Mega Drive, which eventually fractured consumers with four different categories of Mega Drive games in shops. On the other, Nintendo's less divisive

reportedly planning a similar half-step. This isn't virgin territory, as both companies released hardware upgrades last gen, only instead of faster GPUs it was more storage space. Sony and Microsoft also aim to stay one step ahead of mobiles eating into their sales.

So, when's it out? Developers are free to launch Neo-ready games from the end of the year, but that doesn't necessarily mean you can expect the Neo itself. It'll likely launch in mid 2017 and improve Sony's VR experience. As long as it doesn't alienate the playerbase or prove prohibitively expensive, a fresh wave of smoother-running, more gorgeous-looking games can only be good news. Right? ■



Will Sony roll out some sort of discount, whether hardware or software, if you've only just bought a PS4?



NX BOMB

Nintendo talks Zelda, smartphones, and the next generation

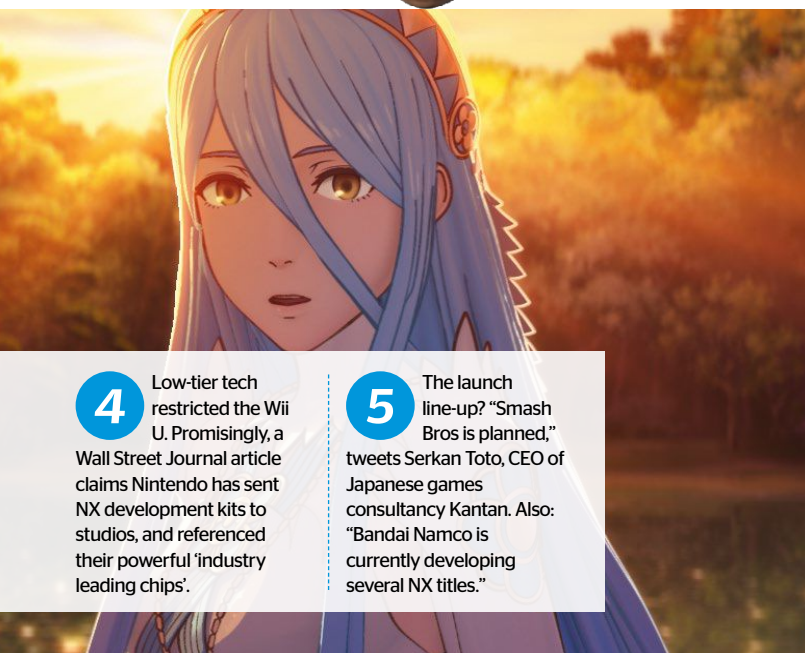


1 One of the more concrete rumours about the NX, as reported in the Japan Times, is that it will use Sharp's Free Form Display technology, allowing for flexible or curved gamepad screens.

2 The NX might well support a subscription service, if a GFK survey leaked last month is to be believed (it's Germany's largest market research institute). Monthly games, PS Plus-style?

3 Will NX be the world's first download-only console? On 10 Feb, 2015, Nintendo filed a patent for a machine with no optical disc drive, so it's either that or it's going back to N64-style cartridges.





4 Low-tier tech restricted the Wii U. Promisingly, a Wall Street Journal article claims Nintendo has sent NX development kits to studios, and referenced their powerful 'industry leading chips'.

5 The launch line-up? "Smash Bros is planned," tweets Serkan Toto, CEO of Japanese games consultancy Kantan. Also: "Bandai Namco is currently developing several NX titles."



The new Fire Emblem mobile game is intended to be "more accessible" than the handheld entries.

"THE NEW LEGEND OF ZELDA GAME WILL LAUNCH CONCURRENTLY ON BOTH WII U AND NX"

N

intendo dropped a host of details during a recent earnings update, covering its upcoming

console, the next Zelda, and plans to move into the world of mobile, before presumably dropping the mic.

First and juiciest, let's talk NX. In front of investors, the Japanese company announced a March 2017 release for Wii U's successor, and that this time it's skipping E3. Why? Coming out with a Nintendo Direct video once all that trade show buzz dies down ensures it'll steal headlines.

This ties directly into its new Legend Of Zelda game. Just as Twilight Princess did in 2006 by releasing both on GameCube and, later, Wii, so too will Link's next adventure straddle the past and present of Nintendo platforms. The difference here being Zelda will launch concurrently on both Wii U and NX. This suggests the latter won't drastically differ in terms of functionality from the former, because if it does, Zelda wouldn't survive the transition. Similar architecture does open up the possibility of backwards compatibility, however.

E3 cheers?

In any case, Nintendo confirms it will be the focus of its E3 presentation. So confident is it in the quality of the game, it will be playable on Wii U for the first time. And not only that, it's the *only* playable game Nintendo is going to be demoing at E3 - it'll be showing others, but none that press or punters can get their hands on other than Link's latest. Let's hope this is a case of Nintendo wanting to focus the spotlight on its best game, and not a sign of a change in direction, or a lack of upcoming projects.

The Japanese firm also told investors that its first ever app, Miitomo, has been downloaded over ten million times across mobiles and tablets. Shifting sights to portable platforms clearly makes a lot of business sense. As such, Fire Emblem and Animal Crossing are both set for smartphone and tablet outings in the Autumn, the former being made into an accessible RPG and the latter incorporating functionality with other Animal Crossing games. Does this mean it'll link up with New Leaf or an as yet unannounced NX version? All we know is that the coming months will define Nintendo. ■

PHAT CONTROLLERS

The new wave of experimental gaming controllers ready to redefine the way we play... maybe

Over the decades the gaming world has seen some truly bizarre controllers: stacking NES robot ROB, stunted Sega Bass Fishing rods, Samba De Amigo's maracas, Activision's doomed Tony Hawk Ride skateboard, Beatmania's DJ decks, and Steel Battalion's mech control panels and pedals just some of the more recognisable deviations away from our typical pads. Yet big businesses and small independent developers both are currently working on

projects that make all of those seem as normal as the Dualshock 4s and Wii U GamePads we use every single day.

Some are being made for mass market distribution, others are one-off projects that'll never exist outside of events or museums, but the very best crazy control schemes in development had starring roles at this year's Game Developers Conference - and GamesMaster was on hand to flap, slap, and lick our way through the wacky world of alternative inputs. ■

VIRTUIX OMNI



WHAT IS IT?

Imagine a treadmill you could walk or run on to move around inside a game - that's the premise behind the Virtuix Omni. It's a 360 degree running platform designed to let you explore VR using your legs, and it features a waist-height halo to keep you upright and balanced. It's also compatible with any PC or mobile VR game that uses gamepads.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Unlike a treadmill, there's no moving 'belt'. Instead, players wear special Omni shoes with low-friction soles that enable you to move and slide around the concave Omni platform with almost no resistance. Tracking pods sit inside both shoes, which then monitor the movement of each foot to deduce the direction you're walking in, your speed, and whether you're backpedaling, strafing, or even jumping. These movements are then converted into the appropriate inputs so your actions are mirrored through your VR headset. Combine this with a motion-controller gun and you could play, say, Call Of Duty by running and gunning in your living room.

HOW MUCH IS IT?

A surprisingly affordable \$699 (£480) plus shipping for the lot - and it's available to pre-order now for estimated delivery in the autumn. Find it here: <http://bit.ly/gmomni>

DEV TALK

"We are a Sony developer, so we do in fact want to take all of our content over to PlayStation VR - connecting to PlayStation is a simple thing for us. It's just simply a licensing challenge."

Robert Brackenridge, Director Of Games, Virtuix



SLAP FRIENDS!

WHAT IS IT?

A one-on-one fighting game where cartoony characters battle through the power of slapping. Naturally, the only way to control this fighter is to don a furry hat with two extra-long pouches on the sides into which you slide your hands, and to then begin flapping your arms up and down towards your friend (no hitting, okay?) like an angry cat boxing a ghost.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Each 'Wear-A-Buddy' - including octopus Professor Wippelsworth, unicorn Sparklepunk Pony and eels-wielding Flappy Fisherman ("I'm reeling after that one!" he cries after getting walloped) - is a hand-sewn combination of off-the-shelf fleece and felt, with

lightweight Bluetooth accelerometers in the arms that talk to a circuit board and battery pack combo in the hat to relay the players' actions into the game.

HOW MUCH IS IT?

The base game itself is planned to come to PC and mobile soon, and will be playable with regular controllers or touchscreen controls. Clearly, the custom hats aren't so easy to mass produce, but the team is looking into options to get them out to market.

DEV TALK

"We outsourced the hats to our lead developer's mother. She helped out with the creation of all of them, and it took a day and a half to sew everything together."

John Ceceri III, Programmer, Pretty Fox Games



THE VON NEUMANN PERSONALITY TEST

WHAT IS IT?

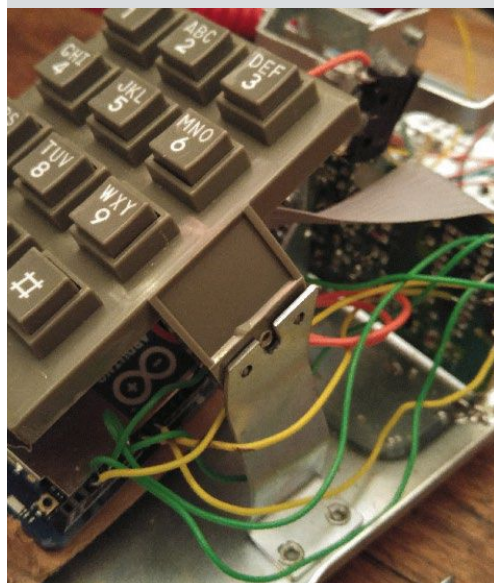
A retro phone, a CRT television set, and a personality hotline – not a combo that makes a lot of sense without further explanation. Players pick up the phone to speak with an automated psychiatrist who tries to map their personality using a series of questions – you watch the various images and videos on the screen and then punch in the number of the multiple-choice answers before hearing your results. Only, it soon becomes clear that the shrink is rather warped, and that the test is both unnerving and uproariously funny.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Creator Matthew Hudgins gutted a retro phone and replaced the innards with an Arduino wired up to the keypad, which is then capable of talking to the game as it runs on a hidden laptop. Then “a ton of adapters” link the laptop to a CRT television (“it’s not like they had HDMI back then!” laughs Hudgins) to run the footage, which mixes bespoke spoof infomercial videos shot by Hudgins with some classic adverts and film footage that was freely available from public domain catalogues.

HOW MUCH IS IT?

The game itself is actually on Steam Greenlight right now, at <http://bit.ly/gmvon>. It’s a more expanded version of the test that can be played on a regular PC – you’re cast as a person taking the test inside a room, where the craziness isn’t just limited to a monitor and a telephone line... The original, custom setup involving the old-school phone and CRT television, however, isn’t something you’ll be able to buy.



BIRDLY



WHAT IS IT?

A full-body controller designed for a bespoke first-person VR experience, Birdly is a machine that wants to fool you into thinking you’re flying through the sky. You lie face-down on the cushioned bed while wearing a VR headset and flap your arms and twist your wrists to move paddles that simulate a bird’s wings. To begin with, you’ll fly through a serene cityscape to get used to the motions, but eventually you’ll move through a portal and be transported into the most famous scene from King Kong as biplanes screech past you.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Flapping on the arm paddles sends you higher, and banking left or right with both arms and your body will turn, but since you’re playing as a bird of prey you can mostly soar around and use your wrists to finely steer.

Twisting them forward and back will dive and ascend respectively, and the hydraulic platform has been designed with feedback in mind: it will tilt your entire body forwards or backwards at the same time. That’s not the only feedback at play – your speed determines how fast a front-mounted fan will blow wind in your face, and the creators have even experimented with smells during prototype stages, releasing odors of water, streets, and smoke when you fly over the corresponding landmarks.

HOW MUCH IS IT?

While it is available to purchase, developer Somniacs won’t share the price – instead saying that each and every order is tailored to the customer and would need to be negotiated. Don’t expect to be buying one for your living room unless you’ve recently won the Lotto...

PETITWO

WHAT IS IT?

An iPad game about migratory birds in which your avian avatar is powered by a zoetrope – a 19th century device that combines a spinning drum with narrow slits and a selection of images (or, in this case, 16 bird models) to create the illusion of a smooth animation. When viewing the birds through the spinning zoetrope, the iPad, which is actually just an external display for a computer tucked away, acts as the background image and prompts you to change direction (with a dial), fly higher (by pumping a pedal), or move deeper into a forest (with a button) to stay on course.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Technically, the only three inputs are the dial, the button and the pedal – all easily linked up to the game by using an Arduino circuit board. The zoetrope merely acts as an animation tool to create the flying bird, which isn’t rendered in the game. The birds were modelled out of clay before being placed on poles and attached to a rotating platform, while the zoetrope was

made from scrap wood – all hand-cut with a handsaw. Finally, a stepper motor brings it all to life to make the bird animation believable.

HOW MUCH IS IT?

Alas, creator Steph Caskenette describes Petitwo as just a “side-hobby,” created to catch people’s eye as they explored GDC 2016. While it took a lot of time to build everything, the materials were mostly cheap. “80% of the supplies purchased were motivational chocolate bars,” she jokes.



THE VIRTUAL FOOTFLYER

WHAT IS IT?

Quite simply, it's a virtual reality-powered paragliding simulator made using actual paraglider components. Players sit inside a full harness that's suspended from a huge, rectangular metal frame, slip on an Oculus Rift, and then use the brakes to steer through the skies. In the most recent version, the game has involved approaching and circling a desert base, dodging enemy fire, and shooting back projectiles.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Everything from the hanging points down is an authentic paragliding harness: players pull on the two brakes to steer and have a throttle to power a rear motor. Naturally there isn't an actual motor on the back, but instead a bass shaker is fitted behind the seat for haptic feedback; it's rigged up to the throttle lever to accurately simulate the feeling of a motor chugging away. A front-mounted fan, meanwhile, blows air into the player's face. And with the entire seat suspended by the frame, meaning your feet are off the ground, it's not too hard to imagine you're really in the air when playing.

HOW MUCH IS IT?

Full-scale production is somewhere on the horizon – perhaps in a year or so after a few more refinements – but the dev can't estimate a cost just yet.

DEV TALK

"With my first prototype I just had a tripod, but it's so realistic that people were picking their feet up and kicking both it and the fans!"

Rob Catto, Program Director, Full Sail University



PLANET LICKER

WHAT IS IT?

A game about a space monster who sets out to devour six planets. Oh, and it's controlled entirely with your tongue – the three 'buttons' are custom moulded ice pops (all different flavours, natch) sitting inside metal containers that then slot into the controller. To eat up coloured planets, you need to lick the relevant ice pops over and over, and the game recognises your tonguing action.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

No, it's not using a pressure sensor. Instead, your licking closes an electric circuit with your body, meaning that your tongue is effectively acting as a wire between you and the pad.

HOW MUCH IS IT?

Unsurprisingly you won't be able to buy your own version of Planet Licker in the near future – game designer Frank DeMarco has no specific plans for it beyond the current hobby project status.

DEV TALK

"The ice pops are all homemade – we make batches of juice. We've experimented with a lot of different flavours, including coffee, beet, blueberry, pink lemonade, grapefruit and vanilla. It's not dangerous – the electric current is so small it's totally safe. And the pad is sanitised every time; we wipe it down with alcohol and everybody gets a fresh set of popsicles."

Frank DeMarco, Interaction Designer, Helium Vine

OCTOBO

WHAT IS IT?

A soft, cuddly, and interactive storytelling plush octopus, complete with a book. Designed for parents to read with young children, the book encourages them to shake Octobo's hands (well, tentacles) and feed it certain things by pulling magnetic 'food' out of the pages and placing it in the pouch in front of its mouth. All the while, the eight-legged friend reacts to these actions – its eye turning into a heart and its mouth puckering when happy, or both opening wide when shocked or scared.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

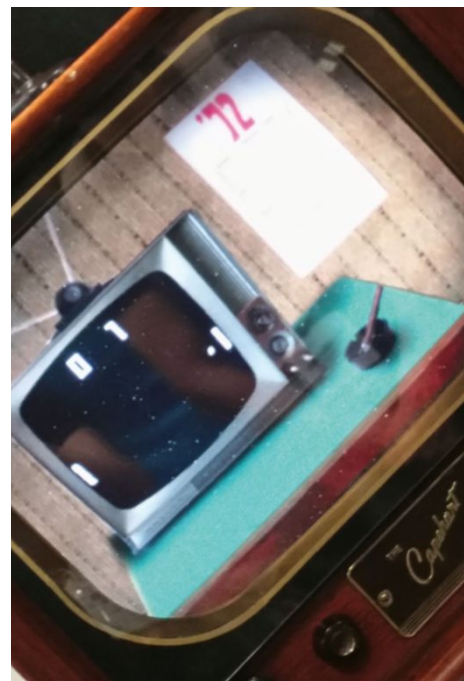
An iPad supplies much of the magic – all of Octobo's facial interaction is down to the tablet that slots into its front pouch. Holes in its fabric face let the eye and mouth show through, creating the illusion of a built-in interactive mug. Sensors in both main tentacles talk to an Arduino circuit board to pick up on those handshakes, while RFID sensors in the various food items found in the book are responsible for Octobo's ability to react with glee or disappointment to different objects being placed in front of his mouth.

HOW MUCH IS IT?

Creator Yuting Su and developer Thinker-Tinker are still working through Octobo's prototype phases, but they're currently seeking collaborators and publishers to bring the project to life as a toy people can buy.



PLEASE STAND BY



WHAT IS IT?

A vintage 1951 Capehart television set complete with faithful controls and rabbit ear antenna, modified into an interactive puzzle and exploration game. It's about exploring television scenes from the 1950s onwards, using the dials to skip through channels that hark back to the eras of Cold War fears and Vietnam War fallout.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

An abstract setup means that much of the game is about trying to understand how to interact with certain scenes. An on/off dial doubles as volume control, while a switch changes scenes between ten channels. Other dials on the front change colour contrasts and screen positioning, and sliders and switches on the back of the television set are

also being considered. That's not all - vibration sensors have been added, so at certain points players will have to bang the sides of the unit to stop images from scrolling, while the innocuous antennae are also critical control inputs and will need adjusting in order to 'strengthen the signal' in certain puzzles.

HOW MUCH IS IT?

Belich took to Kickstarter to bring his previous project - The Choosatron - to market, but isn't looking to repeat that path with Please Stand By and its television setup, which will remain a one-off for exhibitions. However, he's considering a digital-only version for PC or tablets to bring the game itself to a wider audience.





NeoGaf user MrTibbs helpfully put together a cleaned up version of the off-screen grab of the supposedly leaked map.



REDDY FOR MORE?

Red Dead Redemption 2's map leaks - and it looks like a prequel



The Wild West sequel we've all been dreaming of just became a little more real after an image of its world map

recently leaked online. Gaming forum NeoGaf first hosted what looks like a screen grab from a work-in-progress build, complete with area names that rather curiously match up with the 2010 Western adventure. The Tall Trees and Great Plains regions from Redemption's top right corner appear in the bottom left here, strongly suggesting a connection between the two.

Galloping into the world of 'what if' on our steed of supposition, this Red Dead

sequel could actually be a prequel. The town of Blackwater doesn't have a railway in the new map, but it does in the old one. Also, Redemption's overarching theme was the taming of the frontier, so a direct follow-on wouldn't make sense.

Zooming in reveals dozens of potentially interesting locations. There's Sisika Penitentiary which is situated on an island Alcatraz-style, Ovenjta Dam which probably has a pretty nice view if you climb to the top of it, Criard

Slaughterhouse which is presumably quite nasty, Braithwaite Manor which might tie into some class commentary, and Cumberland Forest, which almost certainly has bears in.

Lasso come home

It appears equally as varied as Red Dead Redemption's New Austin, with meadows, mines, marshes, and more. Meanwhile a legend denotes several items of interest, including caravan

camps, gang hideouts, landmarks, homesteads, and robbery locations (could you be playing as a villain?). A box at the top of the leaked image seems to show a separate area in Mexico that you'll visit, a bit like GTA V's North Yankton.

Finally, a fair portion of the map contains water, from the wide rivers to the massive Flat Iron Lake at the centre, so it'd make sense if your character can swim this time - or at least drive a paddle steamer. Tallulah Jetty in the east lends credibility to this admittedly far-fetched theory. Pleasingly, the land mass itself looks slightly bigger, too. Rockstar have yet to officially announce a sequel to Redemption, but six years on, we're due another instalment. Maybe it'll even come to PC... ■

"THE LEAKED MAP SUGGESTS THAT THIS RED DEAD SEQUEL COULD ACTUALLY BE A PREQUEL"

STATS MAGIC

The gaming month in facts and figures

5

Minutes it took streamer Darbian to speed-run the Nintendo classic Super Mario Bros - achieving a new world record in the process.

20

Minutes for Twitch user Kungkobra to complete Fallout: New Vegas, saving time by, among other things, changing from English to the faster Italian.

10,000

Australian dollars offered as the prize in Bandai Namco's competition to find the fastest speedrun of Dark Souls. Unfortunately only open to Australia and New Zealand, it challenged players to post their full runs on Twitch - head to <http://bit.ly/gmspeed> to find out the winning time.



HALO 5
GUARDIANS

SPARTAN'S ARMORY REQ PACK

NOBLE
LEGENDARY

343 INDUSTRIES
LEGENDARY

343 INDUSTRIES
LEGENDARY

TAKE AIM

"I hate when cards feel shoehorned in"

Ben Griffin wants to end the trend of card-based microtransactions

When FIFA 13 launched Ultimate Team, it made sense. The mode smartly taps into the world of sporting sticker books and sees you buy virtual cards representing football players with the goal of forming a dream squad. There's a real world parallel there. You can even trade unwanted cards on EA's marketplace like a global version of your school playground, without the scuffed knees and chicken pox. Then other games got in on the act.

Today, virtual cards feature in games as diverse as Halo 5, UFC 2, Mass Effect 3, Rainbow Six Siege, Ratchet & Clank, Happy Wars, Rise Of The Tomb Raider, and Arslan: The Warriors Of Legend.

They're as good a contextual fit as collectable seashells or marbles or shot glasses - that's to say, they don't make sense at all.

Counting cards

Developers give shoehorning a spirited go. Happy Wars calls them 'Happy Tickets'. In Halo 5 they're 'REQ Packs'. But they represent the same thing: more ways to spend money. In the latter, for instance, a £19.99 Arena REQ Bundle offers high-value armour and weapon skins. For £2.39, Rise Of The Tomb Raider's Sparrowhawk Pack offers a new outfit, bow skin, and a Master Hunter card that deals double damage on animals. Star Wars Battlefront's Bounty Hunter Upgrade boosts Barrage, Impact Grenade, Thermal Detonator, and Explosive Shot for £3.99. These are already full-priced games, by the way.

This isn't so much an argument against microtransactions, which are a necessary evil in an industry devalued by dirt-cheap mobile time-sinks and constant Steam sales, and vitally important for companies desperately looking to recoup losses on expensively produced titles. In a sense, microtransactions and DLC keep games alive. And to be fair, they're often shortcuts for elements you can unlock through regular play, targeting the cash-rich, time-poor.

I just hate when it feels like they're crowbarred in, as if developers saw FIFA 13's success and hopped on the bandwagon without stopping to think why. I'll accept cards in Hearthstone, a game about literally playing cards in a pub, but not Paragon, a game about battling robot assassins in space.

And the trend isn't going away, with Battleborn, Homefront, and Gears Of War 4 soon turning us into card sharks, and continuing to make no effort to justify the ubiquitous rectangles' inclusion. It's as nonsensical as putting a set of stat-boosting Pogs in the next Call Of Duty. Actually, wait, I might be on to something there... ■

"THEY ALWAYS REPRESENT THE SAME THING: MORE WAYS TO SPEND MONEY"

GM MOST WANTED

What's most tickling the team's fancy this month



MATT'S PICK Dishonored 2



Having heard all the hot goss on this over in our cover feature (head to p46 to read for

yourself!) I am so ready for a trip to Karnaca. The first game managed to sneak along a fine line between open stealth and linear progression, and I'm expecting equally adept world-building from the one-time architects of City 17 once more.

PS4, XO, PC - Winter

ROBIN'S PICK Hand Of Fate 2

While a little rough around the edges, the original Hand Of Fate was a fascinatingly unique combination of roguelike adventuring, deck-building, and Arkham-like combat, brought to life by a charmingly evil narrator. If this sequel can refine and expand on the first's wealth of ideas, it'll be something very special indeed - and I can't wait to be special in.

PS4, XO, PC - Spring 2017

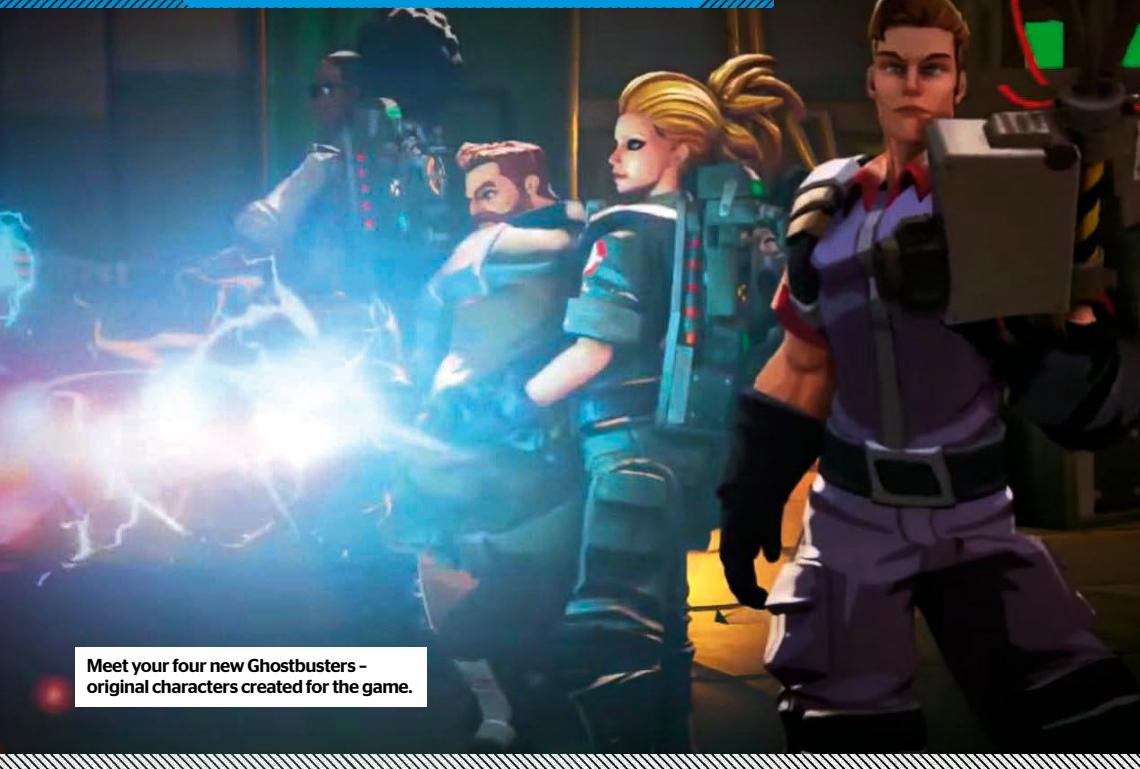
BEN'S PICK Mafia III



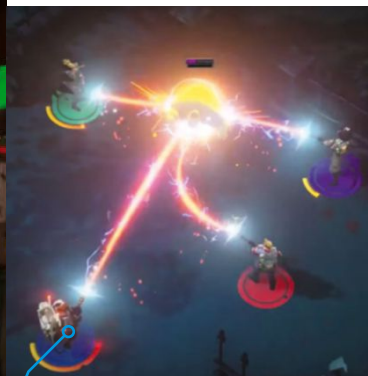
The last open-world crime caper I played was Grand Theft Auto V, so it'll be interesting to see

how a developer that isn't Rockstar handle one in 2016. The atmosphere looks thick, the car handling French-Connection-esque, and the details plentiful. Above all, I can't wait to explore a '60s city to the sounds of Jimi Hendrix and The Rolling Stones. Check it out for yourself in our preview on p28!

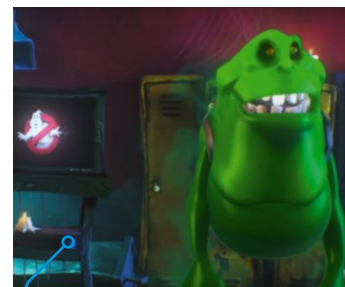
PS4, XO, PC - 7 October



Meet your four new Ghostbusters – original characters created for the game.



Games never get crossing the streams right. It should stop all life as we know it instantaneously, damn it.



Slimer's had a bit of a makeover. He's still ugly as sin, of course, but you've got to appreciate the effort.

ALL FRIGHT ON THE NIGHT

How about a game with your new Ghostbusters film?

The new-look Ghostbusters experience doesn't have to end after the upcoming movie reboot. When the last silver screen spectre is sucked into a trap and Kristen Wiig is finished unleashing one-liners and getting covered in supernatural gunge, the videogame tie-in begins.

A postscript rather than a retelling, it sees you playing as one of four rookie recruits who are tasked with looking after the HQ while the professionals are off saving the day. Thankfully, events conspire to take them away from scrubbing floors and cleaning loos – activities which

wouldn't have made for a very fun game – and into the field, travelling between various haunted Manhattan locations, including a ghost-filled school and a creepy cemetery, purging them of colourful transluents using unstable weaponry and comedically-timed sass.

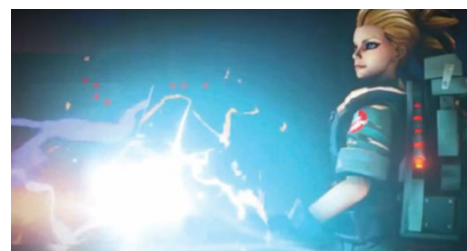
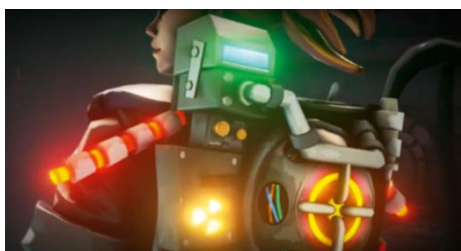
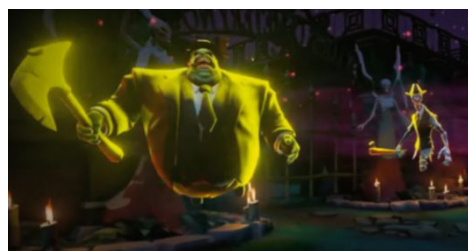
Ghost haste

Each Ghostbuster, two women and two men, has a distinct personality and playstyle, and in joining friends for co-op, you can combine abilities. Using one beam to trap a spirit is effective, sure, but teaming up to overload one with four at once is better. It's not clear what happens when you cross the streams, but in the 2009 videogame, players received a jolt of damage. Unlike that middling and

largely unnecessary third-person shooter starring men in their 30s voiced by men in their 50s, this is a fresh and fast-paced top-down affair, perfectly suited for quickfire play.

As an extra incentive to cleaning up the Big Apple, scouting out collectibles and defeating ghosts boosts your character's unique powers and abilities, adding a more cerebral layer over the top of the accessible arcade experience. ■

“EACH GHOSTBUSTER, TWO WOMEN AND TWO MEN, HAS A DISTINCT PERSONALITY AND PLAYSTYLE”



The Burning Question

What other comedy film would make a great game?



Hot Fuzz

It'd be an awesome game. The health packs would be cornettos!
Kevin Swan, Facebook



The Blues Brothers

The car chase would be incredible, it'd end up as a Burnout game.
Damian Gale, Facebook

Visit www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster and www.twitter.com/gamesmaster to take part in next issue's burning questions.

The original was criticised for its lack of a story mode - this sequel looks set to fix that.

The Burning Question



What would you do if you had a real life mech suit?



Sweet dreams

Rule Earth and demand Haribo make all gummies in my image.
Colin Tunstall, Facebook



Bear necessities

Climb Everest. Kill a bear. Make a coat... And become mech bear!
Beard J Mcbeardington, Facebook

Visit www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster and www.twitter.com/gamesmaster to take part in next issue's burning questions.

DROP IN LIKE IT'S HOT

Titanfall 2 features single-player campaign and sword fights

Titanfall 2: this time there are massive swords. If that's not the tagline for Respawn's first-person shooter sequel, which pits men against mechs across outer space colonies, it should be. In the footage we've seen, a Titan approaches a drop pod and ominously plunges its crackling electric blade into the ground as a gruff South African voice says, "The problem with being a hero is you have to be willing to die for what you believe in. If I were you I wouldn't try so hard".

Could this be the new campaign's villain? A story mode which lead writer Jesse Stern calls "American Civil War in space" should make the package feel fuller than its thin predecessor, and offer more

context. "One of the shortcomings of the first game was we just did not have the mechanism to tell everyone 'here's who you are, here's where you are, and who's around you'," admits Stern, before promising that won't be a problem here.

The joy of mechs

What's more, using Photoshop to sharpen the blurry background image on Titanfall 2's official site reveals two mechs sprinting along a vertical surface. Titans who can now match infantry for manoeuvrability will alter battles considerably.

Publisher EA told investors during a recent conference call Titanfall 2 will launch during the second half of the fiscal year, which in regular person talk means you'll be getting your sword-wielding, wall-running, story-driven action sometime between October and March 2017. ■



"TITANS WHO CAN NOW MATCH INFANTRY FOR MANOEUVRABILITY WILL ALTER BATTLES CONSIDERABLY"



POKÉMOVIE

The Pokémon Company is reportedly auctioning off the rights for a live-action film of the monster-catching series, with Legendary Entertainment, Warner Bros, and Sony all bidding to be the ones to bring it to the silver screen. While Pikachu's had many animated outings already, this would be the franchise's first official foray into the 'real' world.



TOL-KEEN

A sequel to Monolith's surprise hit Middle-Earth: Shadow Of Mordor seems to have been confirmed by a stunt actress' LinkedIn profile. Lauren Kim's online resume listed her as working on Shadow Of Mordor 2 - though she claims it was a 'database error', we'd bet our last gold coin on an official announcement at E3.



BACK ON TRACK

Despite recently being closed down by Sony, Evolution Studios, the team behind Driveclub and Dirt, has found new life thanks to Codemasters. The racing-focused publisher has bought the developer and brought them into the fold - meaning it'll now be free to work on multi-platform titles.



BACK TO BAT

A leak by a Gamestop employee has revealed that Warner Bros may release an HD collection of Batman games Arkham Asylum and Arkham City for PlayStation 4 and Xbox One this summer. Called 'Return To Arkham', it will also come bundled with all the DLC for both titles. Sounds like the perfect excuse to throw on the cowl one more time.



YOU

Topping the leaderboard this issue

WIN
LOSE



YOU



LEFT BEHIND

The Last Of Us film adaptation is officially in "development hell" according to Naughty Dog creative director Neil Druckmann. "There hasn't been any work done on it in over a year and a half," he admitted in a recent interview. Back in March 2014 the project seemed to be storming ahead, with a script by Druckmann, Sam Raimi attached, and a table read held.



SCRATCH A GLITCH

Ubisoft is struggling to keep on top of exploits in The Division, and has started handing out permanent bans to those using them to their advantage. The situation is worst on PC - because many of the game's processes are handled client-side, players are able to cheat directly by modifying their own files, making them invincible and able to teleport around the game's maps at will.



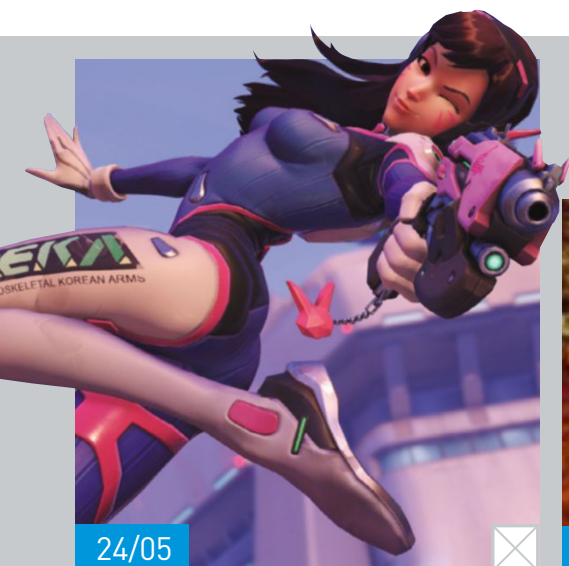
POOR SOULS

As if Dark Soul III wasn't already brutal enough, many PC players are claiming that they have been banned for no reason, with an in-game pop up erroneously accusing them of cheating. While these players are not restricted from playing online, they can only play with other cheaters - so basically they've been sent to Dark Souls prison. Bandai Namco is "reviewing" the situation.



LOSING FAITH

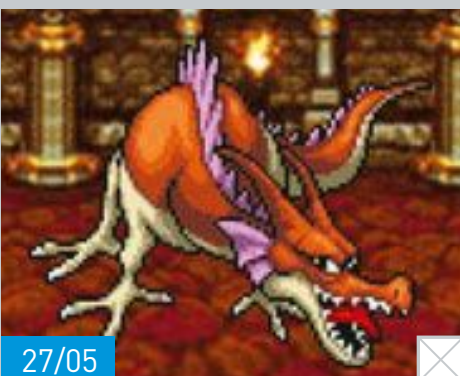
Mirror's Edge Catalyst is once again being delayed, this time by two weeks - so players will have to wait until 9 June. DICE explains that its desire to address player feedback from the Closed Beta is the reason for the delay, highlighting the Social Play features as something it wants to work flawlessly in the final build. It's promised the extra time will "make sure the game is as amazing as possible".



24/05

WATCH OUT

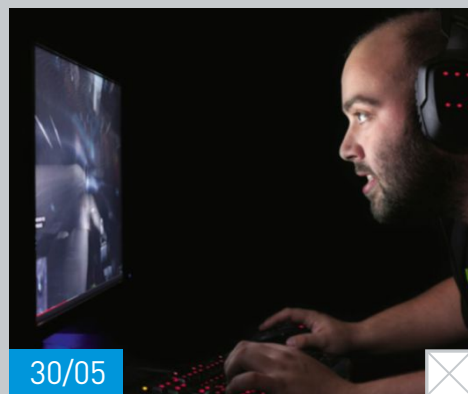
The team multiplayer FPS gets a shot in the arm with Overwatch, on sale now.



27/05

SLIME TO CELEBRATE

Raise a potion today for the 30th birthday of classic RPG series Dragon Quest.



30/05

BANK ON IT

Only one thing to do with a Spring Bank Holiday - catch up on your games backlog.



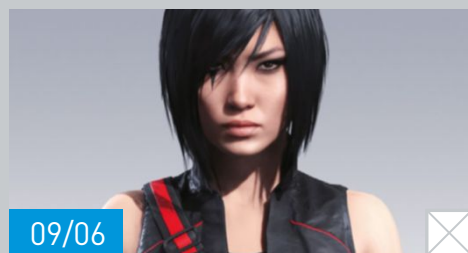
10/06

WHAT'S ON

Sherlock Holmes: The Devil's Daughter is a long title and it's out now.

THE *GM* TO DO LIST

Crucial dates for your gaming diary. If you only do one thing this month, eat, but otherwise make a note of these events...



09/06

CITY FLY

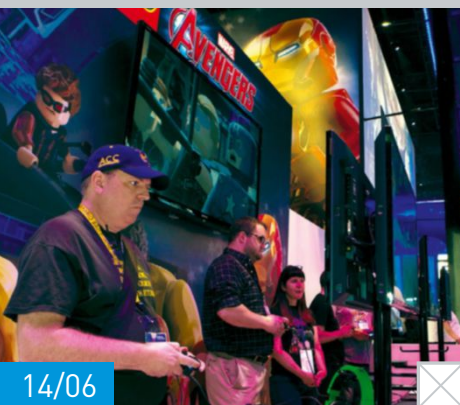
Parkour down to the shops and grab yourself a copy of Mirror's Edge Catalyst.



12/06

PLAY TIME

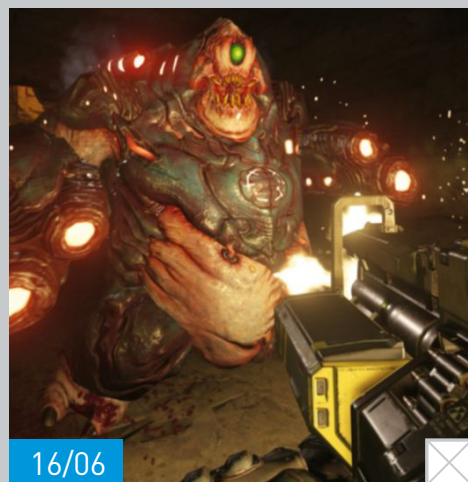
Go hands-on with EA's latest games at EA Play in London and Los Angeles today.



14/06

TRIPLE-E GAMES

It's the hottest date of the gaming year - watch out for all the info from E3.



16/06

HELL YES

Get ready for an explosion of gaming goodness in GM305, out now.

INCOMING

Six big releases headed to a format near you...

<p>01</p> <p>No Man's Sky Format PS4, PC ETA 21 June</p>	<p>02</p> <p>LEGO Star Wars: The Force Awakens Format PS4, PS3, PSVita, Wii U, XO, Xbox 360, PC ETA 28 June</p>	<p>03</p> <p>Deus Ex: Mankind Divided Format PS4, XO, PC ETA 23 August</p>	<p>04</p> <p>World Of Warcraft: Legion Format PC ETA 30 August</p>	<p>05</p> <p>Metroid Prime: Federation Force Format 3DS ETA 2 September</p>	<p>06</p> <p>Final Fantasy XV Format PS4, XO ETA 30 September</p>
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GM Feature

On The Cover!

W MEETS GM

The biggest wrestling superstars share their love of gaming with GM

THE NEW DAY

Who do you guys play as in WWE 2K16, other than yourselves?

Xavier Woods: Steven Regal! We only pick different versions of him, it's unbeatable.

Big E: I will rock with Cesaro. Oooooo00000, Cesaro-ooooo00000. That's hot in 'Yermany'. We're hot in 'Yermany'. He's the man, so I mess with him.

Kofi Kingston: Speaking of 'Yermans' and 'Yerman' suplexes, I would pick Brock Lesnar. Just like I did when I dominated the 2K Tournament and won the 2K Championship title.

Who should be on the cover of WWE 2K17?

Big E: Look no further! It's a slam dunk. The three of us, clearly! Xavier Woods is owning gaming right now, and not just in WWE. Plus the fact that The New Day is everywhere, baby. We've been tag champs for 200+ days. We're out there killing it, making people laugh, we have that power of positivity that's infectious. *Stop looking! Stop looking! Look no more! 'Cus The New Day accepts your offer! Thank you 2K for offering us the cover. We accept! When is our cover shoot?*

What are your fave games?

Xavier Woods: Mario Kart: Double Dash, for sure.

Kofi Kingston: I like fighting games. I'm a big Mortal Kombat fan and Street Fighter fan. I remember playing my first Street Fighter game at the boys and girls club when I was young and I was blown away. I've been a fan ever since.

Big E: I was always a fan of the NCAA franchise, which is now defunct, unfortunately. For a good reason: I won't get into the politics with the lawsuit, but I'm glad the players are finally getting their cut. But anyway, NCAA '09 is probably my favourite.

If you could fight any videogame character in real life, who would you pick?

Kofi Kingston: Woaaaa! I'm married so I won't say Lara Croft, so I'll say... Uhhhhhhhh. Uhhhhhh? There's too many characters. I'm thinking Soda Popinski. I'm thinking Mario. Bowser. Sonic The Hedgehog. Cloud from Final Fantasy. There are too many!

Xavier Woods: Tifa was my first pick but now I'm rethinking. Tina, from Dead Or Alive Volleyball.

Big E: I don't know if this counts, but I was a fan of Wheel Of Fortune on the Super Nintendo, so I'm going to rock with '90s Vanna White.

PAUL HEYMAN

Why hasn't Brock Lesnar been the videogame cover star since his WWE return?

Because we haven't been paid enough for Brock Lesnar to be on the cover of the videogame! When the geniuses who run these videogame companies realise that they'll sell more videogames with Brock Lesnar – and, I dare say, with Brock Lesnar and Paul Heyman – on the videogame, then the money shall flow in the proper direction and the cover art will be commissioned.

Are you happy with your client's portrayal in the game?

I've never felt that the stats really apply to Brock Lesnar. What the gaming community is trying to do is find some sort of way to humanise Brock Lesnar with the stats that they put together for Brock Lesnar in the game. I understand the pitfalls, because how fair is it to all the other characters in the game when you have someone who'd simply have a perfect score across the board? So to take him down a peg, to even the playing field in a videogame, I kind of understand it. I don't personally like it, but it's not for me to like.

Are you a big gamer yourself?

My kids are gamers, absolutely, and therefore in trying to keep that connection and that bond with my kids I am indeed a gamer.

What's your favourite console?

See, I actually have one, but in order for me to endorse it that would mean I'm advocating for the platform, and none of the platforms have offered me a consulting fee, nor a royalty for my advocacy. And since my advocacy is worth so much money – since I advocate for Brock Lesnar – why would I give away that endorsement for free? It



would be like asking me what my favourite pop soda is, or my favourite restaurant, or which hotel I like to stay at the most? Why would I give that endorsement away for free? The Kardashians don't give this away for free. Look at all the money they make with a single Tweet or Instagram post. I think the same respect should be given to Paul Heyman – if you want me to endorse a certain brand, to advocate a certain platform, pay me for it!



RENEE YOUNG

Your Twitter name's Donkey Kong Daddy – are you big into gaming?

I used to be more. I think now when I have free time it's not usually spent playing games. Occasionally I love playing Super Mario. But when it gets down to playing fighting games? I'm bad at those! I'm not good at WWE 2K16. I like to watch it, but in terms of participating, I'm more like, "does anyone want a snack or a drink or something?"

If you had to play, who would you play as?

I'd probably play as Goldust. I'm a big fan!

What's your favourite game?

I like Super Mario, Donkey Kong, Blades Of Steel... I'm an exceptional Mario Kart player – but it's funny. I was at a pub and they had it set up, and I wasn't as good as I remembered because I was used to playing the N64 version. So I was crushing it on the N64, but I had to readjust to the SNES version.



THE USOS

Who do you guys play as in WWE 2K16?

Jimmy Uso: Big deal Titus O'Neil, though maybe that's why I lost in this year's 2K Tournament [at WrestleMania].

Jey Uso: Steve Austin

What's your favourite game?

Jey Uso: Call Of Duty. Probably Black Ops I or Black Ops III

Jimmy Uso: I like the new UFC game. That got my attention! I usually find those hard to play. But favourite? I'd say Metal Gear Solid. I'm also into Call Of Duty, Resident Evil, story games...

And your favourite console?

Jimmy Uso: We were PlayStation guys with PS3, but now we've switched over to Xbox. Xbox One, brother!

If you could fight any gaming character, who would it be?

Jey Uso: Blanka from Street Fighter. I'd like to see him in real life.

Jimmy Uso: That's who you want to fight?! I'd want to fight Mario! That was the first game I ever played, so I want to fight him. You should fight Luigi...

GM Feature

On The Cover!

DAMIEN SANDOW

Do you like how you're portrayed in WWE 2K16?

I would not change a thing! I'm a tricky superstar because my appearance changes and my persona changes from year to year, but it's also a great thing because I have so many personas I can play through all the games. Every year the game gets better and better.

Who should be the cover star for WWE 2K17?

You know what? I think it should be the WWE Universe - the people who buy the game. The people who support us. If it wasn't for them there would be no us.

Who do you play as in WWE 2K16 other than yourself?

Ric Flair, because he's the Nature Boy

What's your favourite game?

WWE 2K16!

How about your favourite console?

I play both Xbox and PlayStation. I'll be honest with you, I'm not enough of a gamer to really decipher one from the other. If I get used to a controller so that I know where the X button is and I know where the Start button is and I can move, I'm in my groove and it's all good.



FINN BALOR

Are you happy with your WWE 2K16 incarnation?

It's dead on! Obviously they could have made me four inches taller, twenty pounds heavier and put the WWE World Heavyweight title around my waist... But it's mind-blowing seeing yourself rendered in a videogame. I grew up when it was FIFA '95 and just pixels. And now? You always imagine yourself in a videogame, but when you see it in 2K16 and you see yourself from all different angles... I know that's me because they scanned every part of my body, but I see myself in the game and I'm like, "do I really look like that? I look weird from behind!" It's a weird experience.

Who do you play as in WWE 2K16?

Believe it or not, I never choose myself. My favourite person to choose is Big Show. When I went to the 2K offices in California I played two of the developers. It was my first game in 2K16 and I beat them using Big Show and his Superman punch. I usually go for mass when it comes to picking - so Khali or Big Show.

What's your favourite game?

Probably Goldeneye 007 on the N64 is my favourite game of all time.

And your favourite console?

I'm a big Game Boy fan. I loved all those Super Marios.

If you could fight any videogame character in real life, who would you pick?

Ooof, good question. Ryu. A little bit of Street Fighter!





WILLIAM REGAL

You're a Legend in WWE 2K16 - how did you like your portrayal?

Am I? I didn't know that - I haven't seen it! That's terrible to say, I'm embarrassing myself.

For what it's worth, we think it's good! If we were to have a WWE 2K16 match, who would you play as?

I would pick Finn... No, actually, do you know what I'd do? I'd be Chris Jericho. Do you know why? Because I'd give him my skillset and he'd be good for a change. I get sick of seeing his two same moves all the time. Little dig at Chris there - it's a long, heated rivalry. Yeah, I'd probably be Finn, just so I could say I'd looked like that once!

KEVIN OWENS

What's it like to be in WWE 2K16?

It's awesome. I actually only had the chance to play once because I'm so busy. The day the game came out they gave me a copy and I played with my son for 20 minutes and that's it, but it's really surreal. I used to have a Sega Genesis and played WWF Raw at the time, and now I'm in a game - it's crazy!

Are you happy with your rating?

I heard I had pretty high ratings, and a lot of people Tweet me and say they can't beat me. They're like, "I'm giving you my finishing move four times and you keep kicking out," and stuff like that. So it sounds like me! All good.

Who would you play as in WWE 2K16?

Finn Balor, just because he's one of the most interesting characters we have. He's a good friend of mine and a fantastic wrestler. In fact, the times I did play, I actually played as him as my son wanted to be me, so I'd be trying to beat myself as Finn Balor. It was pretty interesting.

What's your favourite game?

I really enjoyed the Sega Genesis and Sonic The Hedgehog was probably my favourite game on that. NHL '94 was a big game, but that's really the last time I had to play videogames actively. I have all the current consoles. When I do get a chance I enjoy Mortal Kombat, but that's about it. I have so little time! A couple of years back I got to play through Bioshock and LA Noire and enjoyed those, but I'm more of a fighting game guy: Street Fighter and Mortal Kombat.

If you could have a match with a videogame character, who would it be?

Probably one of those Animal Planet characters because it looks like I'd be able to beat them easily!

Animal Crossing you mean? Like Tom Nook?

Yeah, whoever that is. [Laughs]

GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!

Format PS4, XO, PC Publisher 2K
Developer Hangar 13 ETA 7 October

MAFIA III

High crimes in the deep south, with strategy and smart shooting

W

e're given reason for pause, amid the giddy, freeform carnage of our takedown of a well-guarded Mafia

penthouse, when a rather perfect image crystallises out of the melee. We've just fired a Hail Mary pistol shot into the lavish, open-plan apartment from the wraparound balcony outside, and something special has happened.

Not only has it connected with its target, standing over 50 feet away, and behind a sheet of glass, but for a moment his head and the spatter on the wall behind him are framed flawlessly by the fresh bullet-hole in the window in front of us.

Mafia III's headshots are delightful, by the way. All clean, snappy crack-splat, and neatly underplayed reactions just the right side of theatrical. But that's not the point right now. The point is that out of this organised chaos, this freely flowing river of ebbing opportunities and dynamic diversions, something has happened that feels too good to be an accident. Although

fuelled solely by choice and emergent consequence, Mafia's combat has delivered something that couldn't feel more choreographed and correct. But that, it transpires, is Mafia III all over.

Grow your own way

"No failure but death". That's new developer Hangar 13's mantra for the game, and it bleeds out of Mafia III's every element and eventuality. Where its predecessor was a thoughtfully arranged, highly polished, but linear jaunt through a sumptuously realised '50s cityscape – a beautiful place to play, but ultimately atmospheric set-dressing for a rather A-to-B adventure rather than a true open-world – this late-'60s follow-up is an altogether more involved, choice-driven production. But it's one that, despite the multitude of options on offer at any given moment, is careful not to lose any of the rich, genuinely mature narrative quality that has long elevated the series above the average free-roaming destruction box.

That's thanks in part to a rather canny structure. Over the course of his revenge



New Bordeaux is a seriously dense living, breathing place. You could while away hours just exploring, from city to swamp.



Stealth is always a possibility. But with so many unaware goons to play with, going unexpectedly loud is often very tempting.



Never wise to get caught this far out in the open during a fight. Better blow up that car.

“ALTHOUGH FUELLED BY CHOICE AND EMERGENT CONSEQUENCE, MAFIA’S COMBAT COULDN’T FEEL MORE CHOREOGRAPHED AND CORRECT”



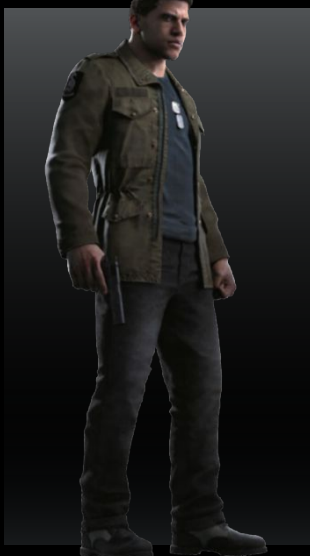
The city alone is incredibly evocative. With a car radio full of Rolling Stones and Jimi Hendrix, the overall effect is stunning.



That guy on the right's got to be up to no good. Just look at his beady eyes and uptight fashion sense - not to mention that suspiciously hairless bonce.

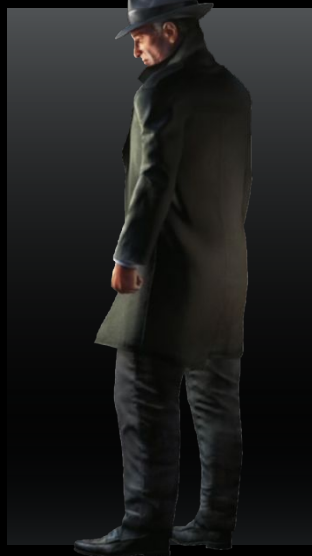
Suspicious characters

Meet Lincoln Clay's crew



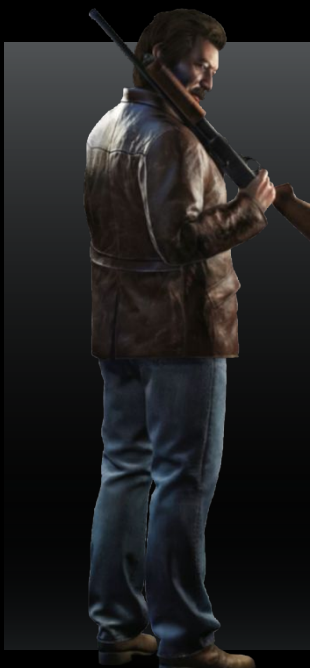
Lincoln

Seeking revenge after his own gang was betrayed, he's bringing street smarts and military training to the fight. But Lincoln also has three lieutenants who manage his growing empire. Tip: Divide it fairly or suffer.



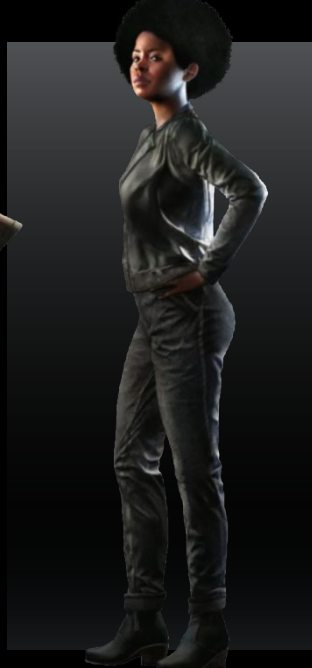
Vito

The protagonist of Mafia II, Vito Scaletta failed to secure an easy retirement, and has since fallen out with the mob and set up his own rebel Italian gang. A bit dejected, but he knows the business.



Burke

The hot-headed leader of the Irish gangs - nope, no stereotypes here. In our demo, we screwed Burke out of a slice of the business, and he went ballistic, making very big threats.



Cassandra

The Haitian boss, Cassandra seems cooler and more collected. Handing territory to her will earn you cool gadgets like explosive lures, so you can see why we overlooked Burke.

war against the Italian mob, Vietnam vet and wronged once-member of the Black Mafia, Lincoln Clay, always has plenty of angles of attack. His isn't a simple quest of murder and macguffins, you see. He won't meander from one vaguely related, madcap story mission to the next, eventually stumbling upon the big bad once he's tired of wasting his time with dozens of extraneous minigames and distractions. Lincoln is taking down the dominant Italian Mafia piece by piece, racket by racket, reducing the monetary income of each scam in turn until he can take it over himself. The means open to him are many and eclectic, but crucially, every move he chooses takes him forward, one step closer to his goal and a little further through Mafia III's intelligent and engrossing tale.

Each type of hit takes down the Italian coffers by a certain amount, and Lincoln

game's design. Taking on our first such challenge, we spend almost as long planning as we do executing, Mafia III's responsive, gluey cover system, robust AI, and multitudinous tools of violent cause and effect lending almost a hint of Hitman Lite to the proceedings.

Beat of Clay

Do we sneak in through the left-hand entry point and stealth-kill as many mooks as we can on my way to quietly taking down the top dog? Do we climb up that street-facing fire escape, skip over the roof, and rain down hot lead from above, taking care to identify and snipe the backup-calling Squealers to start things off? Or do we throw a noise-making distraction down next to that crate of heavy explosives, followed by a molotov once enough of the goons - and their boss - have moved in to investigate?



"DO I STEALTH-KILL MY WAY THROUGH THE ALLEY, OR RAIN DOWN FIRE FROM THE ROOF?"

is always free to choose. And even when taking on the simplest of tasks - say, locating and bumping off an opposing enforcer during a back alley business meeting with a bunch of goons - agency and authorship are at the forefront of the

Any of these things would work, and many more options to boot. In truth, we completely mess up our first go by pressing the wrong button, throwing a grenade at a wall while trying to sneak in, and incite a massive incident of



Lincoln's tour of Vietnam gives him a plausible reason to be good with a gun. These two don't realise it, but they've got no chance.



There's a really distinctive car selection. Being set in 1968, it's full of huge muscle cars that go like the clappers and drift around corners *deliciously*.



The city of New Bordeaux is New Orleans in all but name. Expect immaculate period detail and a thick, soupy, sun-drenched southern atmosphere.



The violence is pitched right between shocking and hilarious. Lincoln's gruesome knife-based melee is pure Rambo, the goons' ragdoll deaths borderline cartoonish.

(technically) uninvited gunfire. But pleasingly, Mafia's action is so deliberately malleable that we can immediately adapt and ride it out with a great deal of fun. There's no hierarchy of 'correct approaches' here. Everything is viable, and you'll never feel punished for messing something up. There is no messing up. Everything you do will feel like the right thing to do. No failure but death.

Mob story

But the real potential of Mafia III hits you once you scale up the lavish freedom in even such a small encounter to the scope of the game as a whole. Instead of taking

down that mid-range goon, we could have robbed a mob building site. To do *that*, we could have ghosted our way in and out while the guards were busy executing an ex-colleague, shot the place up, or perhaps sniped the lot of them from across the road. We could have even called in some hired muscle as a front-of-house distraction while we burgled the place unnoticed. Another option would be to take out the supply trucks fuelling the business. We could go full Road Warrior, enjoying Mafia's satisfying hefty but buttery smooth driving model while strategically detonating tyres and tanks. Or we could



GM Instant Reaction

+ Freedom of choice and intelligence of story make for a very exciting combination – a smarter breed of open world.

– The sheer wealth of options can be a little overwhelming at first – you'll need some time to get up to speed.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Big and beautiful, with greater freedom than in past entries.

just find where the vehicles are parked up and blow them sky-high with a precisely placed grenade before immediately scarpering.

And that penthouse assault we mentioned? To get in there, we stole a known mafioso's car and used its recognisability to drive into the hotel's underground car park unbothered. Two sneaky backstabs and an exploded sedan later, and we were quietly on our way up in the express elevator. Though a loud-and-proud bullet spree through the front lobby was also entirely acceptable.

That's the thing. In Mafia III, everything's acceptable. **David Houghton**



Not the preferred company solution to office conflict resolution. HR are going to go nuts when they hear about this little incident.



GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!

Noctis' warp strike ability means he isn't just restricted to staying on the ground. Bye bye, airships.



Format PS4, XO Publisher Square Enix Developer Square Enix ETA 30 September

FINAL FANTASY XV

It's all coming out in the final stretch



After almost ten years in the making, it's finally in the home stretch. Come the end of September, we'll all be galloping around the countryside of Eos atop majestic Chocobos and taking down the Niflheim empire with magic and giant swords. After holding our breath for so long waiting for info, now we're drowning in it, and we've even had plenty of hands-on time.

Before we get stuck into the juicy new stuff, let's recap. FFXV follows the story of Prince Noctis and his friends after he leaves his homeland Lucis on a journey to see his betrothed. While he's gone, the evil Niflheim Empire reneges on a peace treaty and invades in an attempt to control the power of a mystical crystal. Everything goes to pot, and now Noctis has to embark on a suitably epic journey to restore his kingdom.

We can expect a story with plenty of plot twists and emotional gut punches along the way - this is a Final Fantasy game after all. But this time we'll also have an absolutely massive world to explore while cutting down monsters and mechanised troops, and we've seen more of the summonable Archaeans, arcane gods with vast amounts of power. If you thought Ramuh from the first demo, Episode Duscae, was impressive, just wait until you see the giant, muscular Titan running onto the screen, or the serpentine Leviathan elegantly arching through the sky overhead. Even the tiny fox-like Carbuncle feels stately as it imbues you with its magic while guiding you through the most recent FFXV demo, Platinum Demo (which you can try for free now on PS4 and XO).

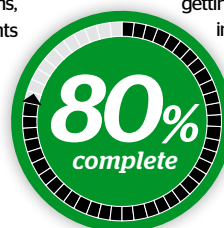
Combat has taken on a new form - it's now stripped back and action-based, with

one button for attacks and four weapons or spells to jump between on the D-pad. It's brilliantly versatile - you can lead in with a small but fast blade for a few strikes, or keep your distance by launching a fire spell to weaken an enemy first, before nimbly switching to something heavier and

getting some more powerful blows in. Learning when to dodge is key, and takes a bit of getting used to at first, but once you get the rhythm you'll find yourself seamlessly weaving between evasion and attack, finding just the right moments to hang back and then suddenly dive in with a powerful Warp Strike.

Bro force

Your party is quite happy to do their own thing alongside you, and so far we've found them pleasingly good at it, with nary a hint of dodgy AI ruining the fun. Our one concern at this point is that only





FFXV's monsters look strangely real despite their bizarre features, and feel much darker and more grotesque than in previous series entries. The worst of them only come out during the night, however - daytime beasts are more manageable.



You don't want to mess with a colossal godly being when you don't even measure up to his little finger.



Each of Noctis' three mates has their own fighting style, and you can switch between them in combat.

having four slots for weapons feels quite limiting - battles might start to feel samey if you don't switch them around often. We're hoping the arsenal will be expanded in the final game.

It's the world itself that intrigues us most though, all of the landscapes we've seen so far seem appropriately huge and fantastical, and yet somehow are still grounded in reality. You'd never see colossal archways of stone or shining crystal formations jutting out of the mountains like meteor trails frozen in time amongst the rocky plains of Arizona, but in FFXV's otherwise realistic desert it feels right at home. The tarmac roads and casual shrubbery dotted around ground everything impressively - seeing a

Behemoth charge at you on your Sunday walk feels like it could be a genuine possibility now. Stopping for a coffee in a plaza while looking up at elevated waterways that seem to work like a fantasy monorail system feels as normal as going on holiday in Italy.

Local delicacy

It's the little twists on mundane details that do it - they're what make all of these locations feel like places you might actually get to visit one day. There are photography magazines with strange landscapes on the front promising pop pointers, and at least three types of individual biscuit brands just casually found on tables and in petrol stations

across Eos. Shop windows are adorned with expensive handbags, and the ice cream carts are filled with strangely tempting flavours.

Noctis might be a Prince capable of summoning 100ft gods and teleporting, but he and his world still feel relatable thanks to touches like these. But will that kind of detail expand to all corners of the globe? When you're off the beaten track, will you find something cool, or the same impressive but duplicated shack you've seen twice before?

We're excited about the prospect of getting lost in the world of Final Fantasy XV, but while it looks enticingly vast, a lot of those hills are also looking a little empty. We know there'll be plenty of minigames to partake in, like fishing and pinball, but we're yet to see any of the sidequests. Here's hoping they're lavished with the same level of attention as the biscuit wrappers. If they are, FFXV could be one of the defining games of this generation. **■ Daniella Lucas**

“NOCTIS MAY BE A PRINCE WHO CAN TELEPORT, BUT HIS WORLD STILL FEELS RELATABLE”

GM Instant Reaction

+ The scale of everything, from the landscapes to the Archaeans, is incredibly impressive to behold.

- It's not traditionally an open-world series - Square'll need to work extra hard to make every area feel alive.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

The epic series returns in spectacular style.

GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!

Designers from previous Tales Of games, including Mutsumi Inomata and Kōsuke Fujishima, have contributed to Berseria.

Format PS4, PC Publisher Bandai Namco
Developer Bandai Namco ETA Spring 2017

TALES OF BERSERIA



Daemonstrating the power of Japanese storytelling

The 16th entry in this long-running JRPG series explores themes of passion and logic by way of pirate ships,

pandemics, and raven-haired heroines with claws for hands. Strangely, producer Yasuhiro Fukaya is drawing from experiences of Japan's corporate world.

"[People] have many problems, like in a social situation or organisation they belong to that doesn't allow them to live their life as they like, so we wanted to convey the message that people can hold onto their beliefs even if their company doesn't allow it, and they don't need to give up their beliefs or their dreams."

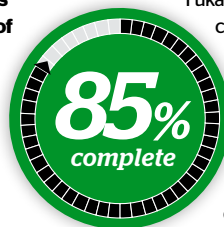
Tales' first ever solo female heroine, Velvet, endeavours to stop the Daemonblight, a deadly affliction spreading through the land - and her funky left arm. Of course, magnetic party members are here to help. This time you can recruit the likes of Magilou the

easygoing witch, clumsy exorcist Eleanor Hume, and Eizen, a reaper with 'a passion for friendship', crossing flowery fields, tropical beaches, and a windmill-strewn paradise resembling Greece's Mykonos with them in tow.

Arte attack

Fukaya dubs Berseria's better combat the Liberation Linear Motion Battle System because, in these multi-character scraps, players now have full control over the camera. "Before Berseria, when the character encountered the enemy, they needed to move to a special battle area, but here the character and enemy can start battling seamlessly," says Fukaya. "This is actually the main point of feedback with the users," he adds.

You can also program moves - or Artes - onto face buttons, and use the Break Soul system to bolt even more of them onto combos. True to the overarching freedom vs. oppression storyline, fighting in this new Tales Of offers a more open means of expressing yourself. **Ben Griffin**



GM Instant Reaction

+ A premise concerning the conflict between emotion and reason sets the scene for a sweeping Tales Of story.

- Only fans of the series will appreciate Berseria's subtle combat improvements, such as Arte combos and Break Souls.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Tales has always excelled at story - we expect no different here.

Format PS4, PC, PS Vita Publisher Bandai Namco
Developer Bandai Namco ETA 30 August



GOD EATER RESURRECTION

A delectable smorgasbord of monster-slaying

What might a god taste of, we wonder? Probably Nutella, or a double bacon cheeseburger. In the post-apocalyptic world of this co-op combat RPG, based on the popular Japanese franchise, they taste like victory. Dubbed for western ears after a PS4 release in Japan last year, *Resurrection* lets three-player teams nom on deities.

After creating a fresh member of an elite force tasked with saving what remains of humanity, you're given access to powerful transforming weapons called God Arcs. Holding triangle splits the weapon into a black pair of giant mandibles to bite and snap at foes, and connecting with a chomp swallows any loot the god - or Aragami as they're also called - is holding. These can be put towards forging new weapons and upgrading equipment in your safe house.

Of course, you'll have to kill your quarry first. In our session we first tackle tutor Hibari's training course set inside a concrete arena bearing foreboding slash marks on the walls. You can hold R1 to change the sword into a firearm held at waist level almost like a Gatling gun, and

cycling through projectile types, you can pick plasma bursts, long-range sniper shots, and colourful close-range shotgun blasts. Holding R1 and pressing circle flicks the weapon into its third form, a great gleaming shield, that deflects any and all incoming attacks as long as your stamina bar holds out.

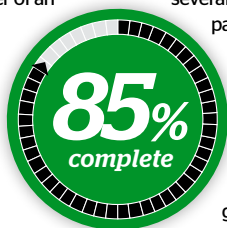
Epic meal time

Next we pick our mission. God Eater's structure seems split into self-contained skirmishes against between one and

several supernatural harbingers of pain, and you can tackle them all with up to two other players online. The first takes place on a broken bridge overlooking a city covered in what looks like tatty alien tarpaulin, where giant flying eyeball things ('Ogretails') need dispatching

with rising hacks and slashes before we take on troll-like Kongou, whose thrashes and charges devour health.

Despite clearly striving towards faithfulness to the franchise, it's hard to call *Resurrection* pretty, taking place as it does in bleak, ruined urban landscapes. But in efforts to distract your eyes by filling your belly, Bandai Namco is accompanying this game's release with *God Eater 2 Rage Burst*. Buy that and you'll get this free. **Ben Griffin**



Chatty bots amply fill in when you can't find human buddies. After scraps they'll blurt out asides about heading back to base and sleeping for days.



Seven years since the anime started, is it too late to get involved? If you like killing monsters, no.

GM Instant Reaction

+ Grinding monsters for rare ingredients could prove addictive, especially when teamed with up to two friends.

- It's an ugly game about nightmarish beings in the ruins of society. Hardly the most inviting environment.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Every monster's a meal in this meaty - but bleak - mutant hunter.



Embark on battles armed with nothing but snappy one-liners (and a shoulder crushing large weapon capable of killing gods).

GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!

Format PS4 Publisher Square Enix
Developer Tokyo RPG Factory ETA Summer

I AM SETSUNA

Evoking the golden era of JRPGs



Hard-resetting a genre burdened by doe-eyed teenagers and UI-cluttered screens, this JRPG is both game and tribute, channelling the spirit of Chrono Trigger and early Final Fantasy. Starkness in our demo's first area, the Fionean Territories, is arresting – refreshingly, there's nothing on the screen besides our three-person party carving a course through pure white snow. The quaint wooden Purikka village is our destination, populated by NPCs like 'irritated waitress' and 'plump young man' spouting a concise line or two about our pilgrimage to sacrifice magical maiden Setsuna and drive away savage beasts.

Mixing turn-based honour with real-time rule-breaking, meeting monsters locks you in a circular arena to thrash out your differences using two primary methods: 'attack' deals damage with your equipped weapon (sword, dagger, glaive), and 'combo' reels off the magical moves you've assigned, from lightning blasts to blanket cyclones to group heals.

Maiden voyage

Foes don't freeze while you're making choices, but taking damage is sometimes a legitimate tactic, as you can pay it back in kind by pressing Square when your momentum bar fills. With two-person team-ups and status ailments such as poison and paralysis to play with, combat's surprisingly in-depth given the lack of customarily confusing JRPG interfaces. This is clean and classic.

Structurally it does seem a little basic though – our first dungeon, Frost Caves, is just a few linear ice paths strewn with obligatory battles. But while visuals underwhelm on a technical level, enemy design is a definite strength, featuring mottled exploding seals, weasels pushing giant snowballs, and 'shroomback' gorillas with shoulder fungus.

With a welcoming world that doesn't require further reading, 2016's most traditional JRPG is also its freshest. **Ben Griffin**

GM Instant Reaction

+ The clean, elegant style doesn't overload you with information, making for a more inviting experience.

- Seeing as the game was also designed for PS Vita, on which it's currently out in Japan, visuals underwhelm.

THRILL-O-METER



Despite the bleakness, this is a warm and welcoming JRPG.

“EXPLODING SEALS, WEASELS PUSHING SNOWBALLS, AND GORILLAS WITH SHOULDER FUNGUS”



Comb forgotten shores and forbidden forests for craftables, like teardrops and ear fur, and chefs will make you useful potions.



Snow patrol

Atsushi Hashimoto, I Am Setsuna's director, gives us the full lowdown

"The theme is not 'sadness' as much as 'wistful melancholy and longing', - which is the literal translation of the Japanese word Setsunai. So there are elements of sadness within it, but it also carries a nuance of momentary beauty and is coloured by other emotions as well. This is certainly not a game where you experience nothing but sadness, so I don't feel that players will be depressed by it.

"What I am proud of more than anything is how we were able to get together a team of people who all got into game development from the influence of JRPGs of the '90s, and who still love RPG games today, and then put all those people's passions and love for the genre into our game."



It's the small details that impress. You can actually carve tracks in the thick snow, and there are cute little snowmen outside the houses.

GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!

Format PC, PS Vita, 3DS Publisher Aksys Games Developer Spike Chunsoft ETA 28 June

ZERO TIME DILEMMA

The Zero Escape trilogy ends with a bang – but will it again if you reload?



Nine strangers are locked in a facility together, held prisoner by a mysterious, malevolent figure known as Zero. There's a way out, the group's told, but not everybody will make it through alive. Sound familiar? It should. This premise formed the backbone of the first two Zero Escape games, 999 and Virtue's Last Reward. And after huge fan support rescued it from cancellation, it's now also the setup for the final chapter in the narrative adventure trilogy.

To escape, our group can't simply find a key and slip away. Instead, the nine stars are split up into three teams, trapped in a trio of wards with an elevator to freedom sitting in the middle. To unlock the doors to the elevator, the prisoners need to explore the wards and uncover six passwords. The catch? To unlock each password, somebody needs to die...

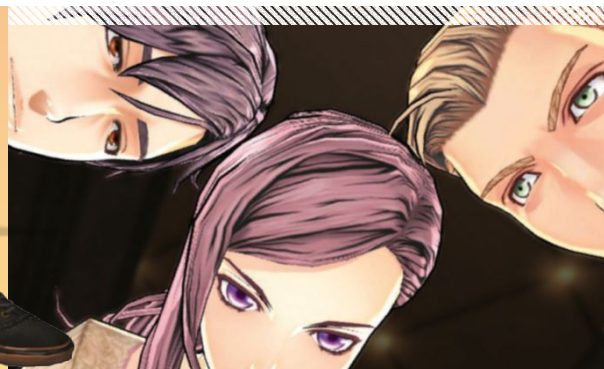
Noughts and posses

Part point-and-click adventure, part graphic novel with branching plot lines, Zero Time Dilemma introduces some major changes to the series. Lengthy, text-led story elements have gone entirely, replaced instead by fully-voiced, 3D cutscenes that push the narrative forwards.

In an even bigger shake-up, you won't play the story chronologically. That's because on top of being kidnapped and trapped in the facility, our nine test subjects wear watches that inject them with drugs every 90 minutes – not only sending them to sleep, but wiping all recent memories. As a result, you choose scenes to play from a floating chart of story 'fragments'.

These fragments slot into a complete timeline, so you'll slowly build up a full understanding of the overall tale as you

"FIRE THE GUN AND THERE ARE TWO POSSIBILITIES: IT'S A BLANK AND HE LIVES, OR IT'S REAL AND HE DIES"





Though Zero Time Dilemma's designed with newcomers in mind, it will answer key plot questions left over from Virtue's Last Reward.



We weren't locked in...?



90%
complete

start picking your way through the time fog. It's entirely conceivable you might drop into a scene where somebody's already dead and you're not sure how the situation arose, and you're free to select another team and another chapter at any point.

Who's on these teams exactly? A mix of old and new characters. Junpei and Akane are back, part of Team C alongside their "honourable" team captain Carlos. Both Sigma and Phi return too, joining the meek Diana who's Team D's leader. Finally, Team Q's home to three new faces: perpetually panicked Eric, who provides comic relief; Mira, who "likes to show off her body" and isn't afraid to speak her mind; and their captain Q, a smart kid who wears an oversized spherical helmet.

999 problems

There's one more major shake-up to the Zero Escape formula, and we discover it during a decision scene. In a masochistic plot straight out of Saw, Zero has locked Phi in an incinerator and strapped Sigma to a chair in an adjoining room. A three-minute timer is counting down to Phi's roasting, and the only way to open the door to safety is if Diana pulls the trigger of a revolver. A revolver containing three live rounds and three blanks that's pressed up against Sigma's temple, that is.

Don't pull the trigger and Phi dies. Fire the gun and there are two possibilities: it's a blank and Sigma lives, or it's real and he dies. The result is random.

Are random results a good thing? We're not sure. It keeps things unpredictable, but it's conceivable that people hoping to 100% the story could fall foul of the wrong outcome multiple times in a row, necessitating extra replays. The ability to skip through scenes helps, but it still seems a potential nuisance.

Yet perhaps this anguish is fitting for the game's themes? Zero's big show and dance is all to highlight the world's injustices, while Spike Chunsoft director Kotaro Uchikoshi wanted to make a game about coincidence. Randomisation links to both elements, and we're assured it won't be overused.

That concern aside, Zero Time Dilemma bears all the hallmarks that made the other two games so great. Brave and bloody, complicated and enthralling, it's great to have Zero Escape back again. ■ **Matthew Pellett**

Hmm, 18:10...



GM Instant Reaction

+ Virtue's Last Reward is one of the best narrative adventure games around - finally we'll get to resolve its remaining mysteries.

- Random outcomes mean completionists may have to endure some frustrating sequence replays to secure every outcome.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

This game almost didn't get made - we're chuffed it's on its way.



I think, if we end up losing this game... we're all going to die.

Format PS4 Publisher Koei Tecmo Developer Team Ninja ETA Winter

NIOH

Enjoy it while you can: you oni live once

Considering the lavish quantities of praise and critical adoration heaped on every instalment in From Software's Souls series, it's surprising that developers aren't queuing up to crib the template. Rock-hard difficulty may be in vogue, but few studios have had the chutzpah to go up against Miyazaki's masterpiece more directly.

Enter Team Ninja, armed with its feudal take on the formula. Because whereas Souls looks to a Western tradition of gothic fantasy for inspiration, Nioh is rooted in a distinctly Japanese flavour of folklore, history, and legend. It's a world in which

razor sharp katanas clash with the hides of fiery ogres. And rather than exploring stone citadels in plate mail, you're more likely to be dashing across temple rooftops in a samurai's wooden garb.

Rain or shrine

But we're getting ahead of ourselves, because our time with Nioh's alpha build doesn't begin with fire demons or precision steel – it begins on a desolate beachhead. Our character, William, is a barrel-chested mariner outfitted in little more than a set of tattered rags, defending himself with nothing but his two calloused hands. Fortunately, a well-worn katana is the very first piece of gear we stumble across, conveniently placed in front of a glowing shrine.

It's here that Team Ninja's inspiration first becomes obvious, because the shrine is very much Nioh's answer to the Souls series' bonfire, and it serves the same multitude of functions. Most crucially, it allows you to save your progress and level up, spending XP to enhance a roster of role-playing stats. What's more, a visit to the shrine also resurrects all of an area's enemies. Competency is not only a

matter of learning to dodge and block more successfully, then, but also a question of learning the ins and outs of enemy placement.

For all of its liberal borrowings, though, Nioh quickly asserts itself as a distinct proposition too. There's a far greater emphasis on gear, for instance, with every other enemy encounter seemingly ending in an explosion of flashing loot. As such,

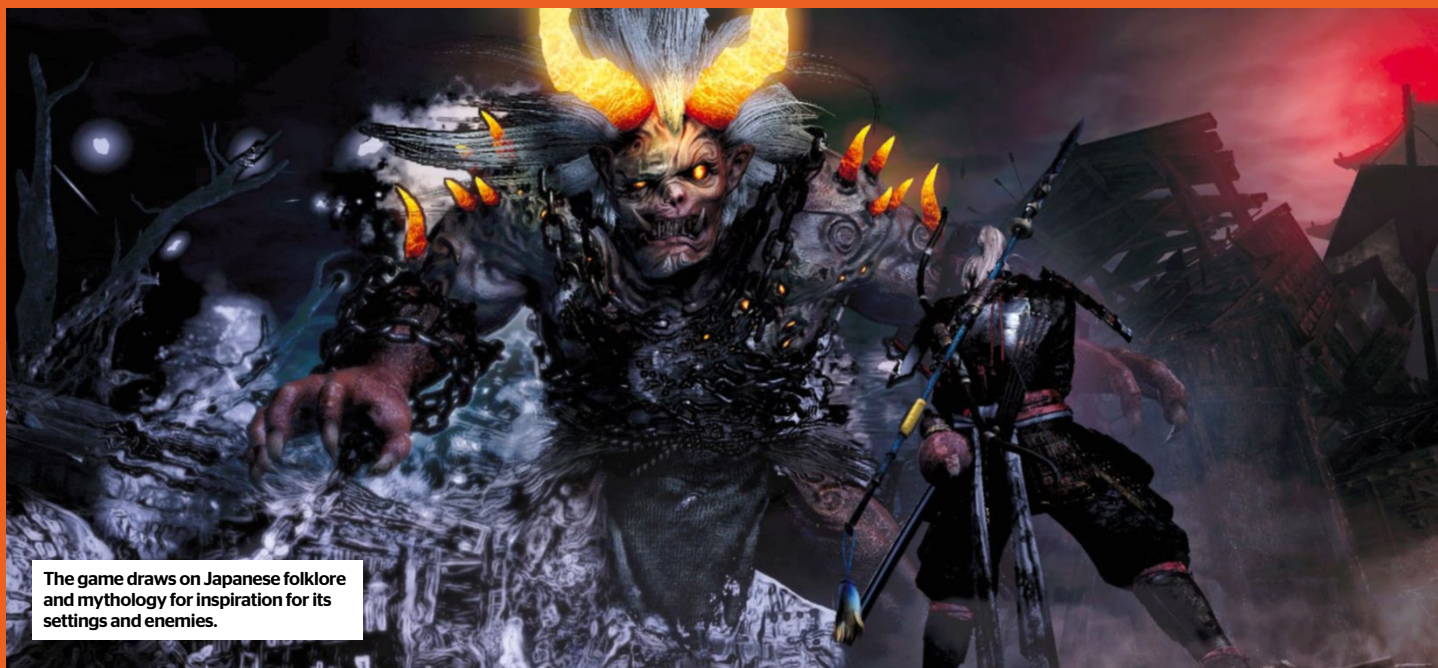
“NIOH IS ROOTED IN JAPANESE FOLKLORE – IT’S A WORLD IN WHICH KATANAS CLASH WITH THE HIDES OF FIERY OGRES”



Nioh was announced way back in 2004, and was based on an unfinished script by the legendary filmmaker Akira Kurosawa.



Our demonstration opens with William washed up on the beach of Usuki, a small fishing island.



The game draws on Japanese folklore and mythology for inspiration for its settings and enemies.



you'll find yourself poring over the comparative virtues of greaves and gauntlets in a constant effort to keep your character ahead of the prodigious difficulty curve.

One well-armoured lieutenant initially feels like a formidable mini-boss, thanks to his soaring defence stats and a lethal three-part combo. Once we've hoovered up some better gear, levelled up a couple of times, and gotten a better handle on the game's cautious combat rituals, however, we steamroll the puffed-up chump.

Guardian angels

Nioh is, at times, admirably silly too. The Guardian Spirits that accompany you in your quest - and act as bestial special moves once you fill up the relevant meter - are an especially quirky bunch, and the arrival of an electrical pomeranian to buff your katana attacks certainly cuts through a certain amount of feudal fustiness. The presence of cinematic swordstrikes, triggered when you land a decisive strike on a powerful enemy, also go some way towards lifting the oppressive atmosphere a little.

In spite of its sometimes heavy-handed mechanical appropriation, it's charming details such as these that ultimately prevent Nioh from feeling derivative in moment-to-moment gameplay. Whether or not the finished game will be able to emerge from the shadow of a certain three-part masterpiece, however, is something we don't yet Nioh... **James Nouch**

GM Instant Reaction

+ An agreeably brutal difficulty level that demands caution, careful memorisation, and a considered approach to gear.

- For all of its tweaks to the formula, Nioh may struggle to escape the anxiety of influence that currently ties it to Dark Souls.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Team Ninja riffs on a familiar theme to produce a compelling variation.

PRETTY FLY FOR A SAMURAI

An awesome Asian arsenal

Katana

Offering a captivating blend of lethality and speed, these tasty blades excel in versatility above all else. Adopt the 'aggressive' stance for extra stopping power - though it'll drain your stamina bar.



Spear

Lots of versatility here - heavy attacks enable William to lunge at a single target, using the spear's reach to keep his foe at a distance. A sweeping light attack, meanwhile, is handy for crowd control.



Heavy weapons

These are no piddling hatchets - they're hefty battleaxes and brutal warhammers. But while they deal formidable damage, they demand a great deal of skill, as one missed swing will leave you wide open.



Bow

The humble bow and arrow may seem a little limp, but it's a vital tool in William's arsenal - weaker foes will die to a headshot, while large monsters can be baited into a more advantageous position.



Aggro more than one or two weak enemies and you'll quickly be overwhelmed. As such, it's absolutely crucial to move cautiously through unfamiliar environments.



Every weapon can be used in three stances - defensive, balanced, and aggressive - each with different combos and levels of stamina drain.

GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!



The game boasts impressive star power, with a voice cast of sci-fi actors including Mark Hamill and Michael Dorn.

Format PC Developer NGD Studios
Publisher Wargaming ETA Summer

MASTER OF ORION

The studio that's won with war machines brings us a world of... worlds

Industry behemoth Wargaming has already conquered land, sky, and sea (with World Of Tanks, Warplanes, and Warships respectively), so naturally it's time for it to take on the final frontier. This is no third-person vehicular shooter, mind - rather it's a reboot of the classic titular space strategy outing that sees you building a grand empire among the stars.

Available now in Steam Early Access, the game immediately impresses with its slick production values. Whether you're colonising a planet, negotiating with a rival empire, or directing your fleet in battle, you'll find crisp visuals, charming animation, and intuitive UI design throughout.

Unfortunately, in the current build, Master Of Orion has a bad case of style over substance. The actual meat behind the shiny window-dressing feels uninspired - aliens look great, but they're all just animal-people with shallow personalities, from the brutish, swamp-dwelling lizard-men to the elegant but vicious cat-ladies; fully voiced and animated advisors are a cool touch, but their dialogue is frequently grating

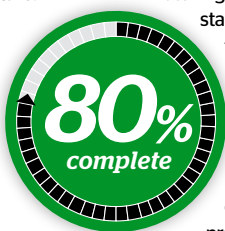
and unfunny; customisable spaceships in theory allow you to give your forces a unique look, but in practice every result is as generic as any other.

Master of none

And it's a problem that extends to the game's mechanics, too. While the moment-to-moment management of your empire certainly has a compulsive quality, it's not long before it becomes painfully clear that you're simply

watching numbers slowly rise. As it stands right now, enemy AI is far too dim to present any real challenge, and there's no true depth to the choices available to you, from deciding in which order to build structures on your worlds, to progressing along the disappointingly linear technology tree as it presents incremental bonuses with characterless labels such as 'Physics', 'Biology', and 'Government'.

While there is some time to go before the game's release, it looks to be only a few months - not long to improve the fairly dull core on offer here. Wargaming has had a hell of a run of hits, but if this space-flavoured Civ-like (farmed out to another studio for the development legwork) doesn't shape up, it could be its first flop. **Robin Valentine**



GM Instant Reaction

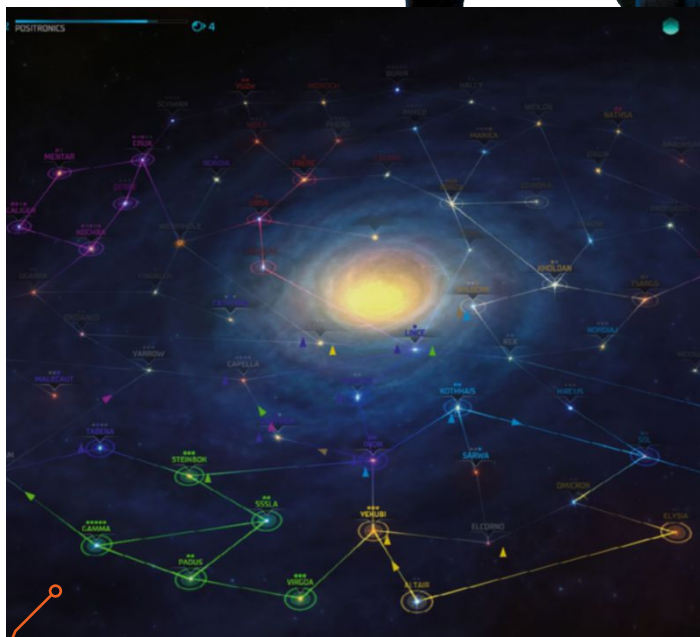
+ The look and feel of this reboot benefits from a big budget sheen of quality animation and menu design.

- In its current form it's a disappointingly dry experience that makes little effort to bring anything new to the table.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

A handsome but hollow experience - hold fire, 4X fans.



Each of the alien races has its own set of traits, but in play the actual difference feels very slight - just minor bonuses and penalties.

Format PS4, XO, PC Publisher Square Enix
Developer Sushee ETA May 2017

FEAR EFFECT SEDNA

Will this belated sequel be a case of return to Sedna?

Three years ago, Square Enix invited indie developers to pitch ideas for revivals of some of its most beloved dormant franchises, encouraging them to remix, reimagine, and reinvent. Now that seed is bearing fruit, with a new take on Fear Effect crowdfunding its way into life.

Sedna is the product of the publisher's 'Collective' venture, which allows devs to get the thumbs up to continue Gex, Arachnax, and this classic shooter series, in exchange for a percentage of the resulting sales. The catch? They've got to crowdfund the costs themselves, and strangely Square Enix gets a cut of that Kickstarted dosh too.

This comeback, then, is being handled not by the now defunct Kronos Digital Entertainment, which worked on the PlayStation originals, but a fresh French outfit, Sushee, best known for PC point-and-click adventure Goetia.

As a result, it's no surprise that Fear Effect Sedna will ring in the changes, despite being pitched as a direct sequel

to the original now 16 year old release and its 2001 prequel, Retro Helix. Most notably, Sedna switches the action from the fixed-camera third-person view to a full on isometric perspective, while Sushee has also stressed that tactics will take precedence over action when it comes to gameplay.

Stressing the point

You'll need to monitor not only your health, but also Sedna's new meter - your stress level. And with the switch in setting from the original Hong Kong to a new locale in Greenland comes a darker, scarier atmosphere than seen previously, tapping into Inuit mythology. It's an attempt by Sushee to put its own stamp on the IP, though fans of the original shouldn't be too alarmed; also on board in an advisory role is writer, director, and producer of the first two games, John Zuur Platten.

At time of writing the Kickstarter campaign isn't yet finished and funded, but we think it a safe bet that now that you've got this mag in your grubby, game-loving mitts, it'll have already met its goals. Head to <http://bit.ly/gmsedna> to see for yourself... **Keith Andrew**



The isometric viewpoint represents a daring new direction for the series - as does the glowing hula hoop attached to characters' feet.



Fear Effect's mercenary leads Hana, Rain, Glas, and Deke all return.

GM Instant Reaction

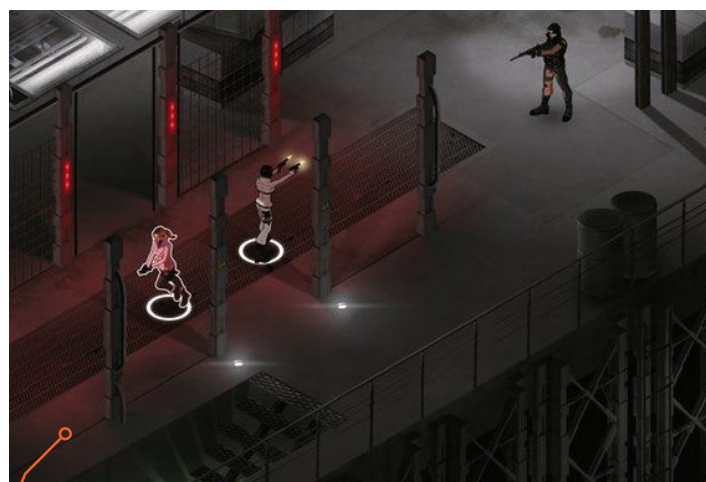
+ A bold attempt to do something new and interesting with a series we'd thought long gone.

- Current footage of cutscenes suggests the game's script and dialogue may not be it's strongest suit.

THRILL-O-METER



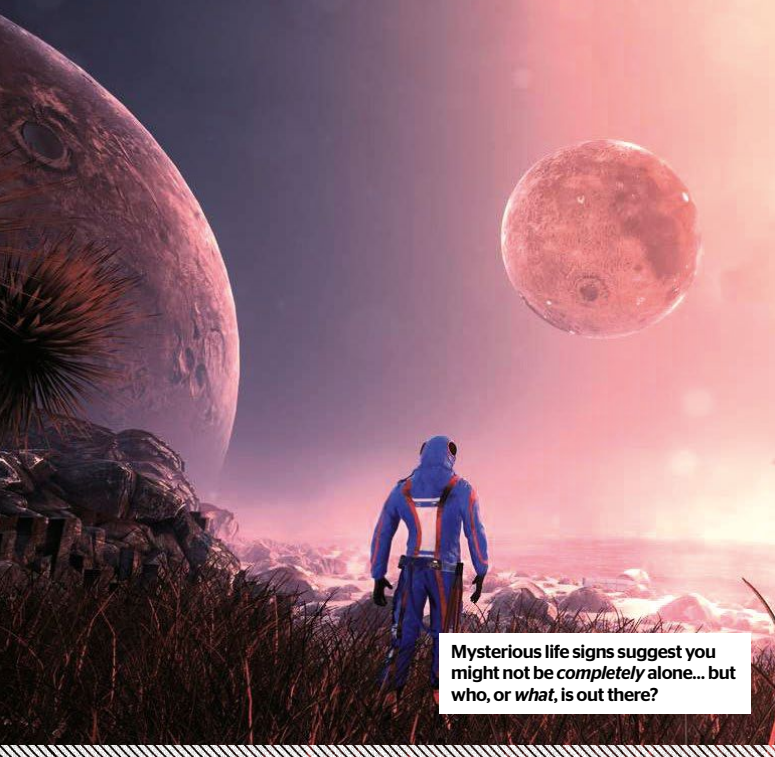
Could indie ingenuity revive this retired series? We hope so.



Early screenshots of Fear Effect Sedna suggest Greenland has far more industrial-style nightclubs than we'd imagined.

GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!



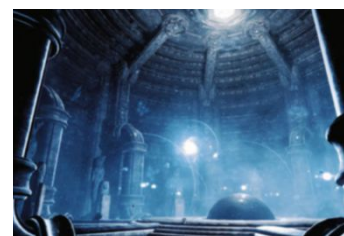
Mysterious life signs suggest you might not be *completely* alone... but who, or *what*, is out there?



The world is packed full of tombs to explore, and there are no professors with whips or women in tight shorts to beat you to the treasures, either.



Picking up ancient artefacts can expand your abilities.



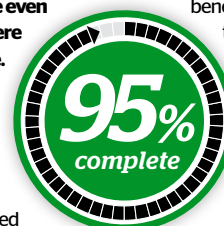
Format XO, PC **Publisher** Grip Digital
Developer Teotl Studios **ETA** May

THE SOLUS PROJECT

Like Matt Damon in *The Martian* meets *Minecraft*

They say you never know what you've got till it's gone. When it comes to taking on Teotl's forthcoming survival story, finding yourself marooned on a barren planet in the vastness of space can make even putting the bins out back here on Earth seem like paradise.

Played out in first person, investigation and exploration are the two constant driving elements, as you struggle to stay alive while uncovering the mystery of just who has visited Gliese-6143-C before you. Play is balanced between crafting items just to keep yourself going, and venturing deeper into the caves and tombs winding beneath the planet's surface to find the secrets within.



Dark Solus

It may not be action packed, preferring to cultivate a quiet, lonely atmosphere, but what we've played of *The Solus Project* makes it clear it's still a

fight for survival, with everything from hypothermia to heat stroke threatening you from the moment you step out of your ship. But the game itself faces a tougher battle – standing out in the sea of survival games, and going toe to toe with *No Man's Sky*. **Keith Andrew**

'Solus' means 'solitary', and it looks like this project is aptly named, with friendly company on this alien world hardly forthcoming. You'll need to learn how to stay alive in inhospitable surroundings, finding food, water, and shelter – the irony is that your mission, so rudely aborted when your ship was fired upon by enemies unknown, was to save humanity by finding a new home. Now even your own continued existence is in question.

Instant Reaction

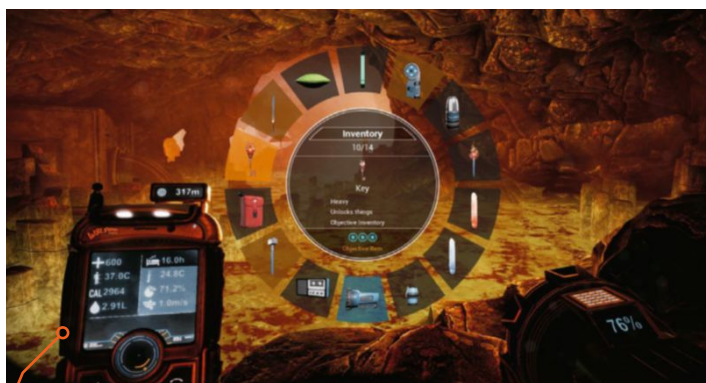
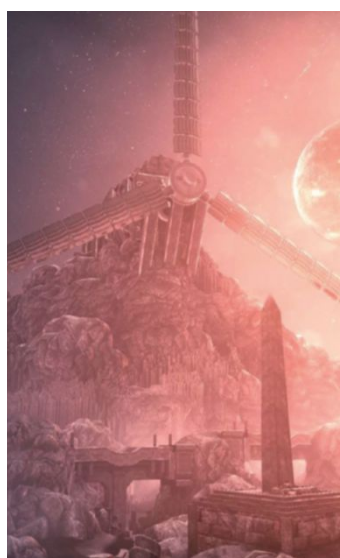
+ A bleak and barren tale of space survival that beautifully layers in a growing sense of danger with every step.

- The dry, slow-paced feel won't keep those expecting more typical space bound adventures on board for long.

THRILL-O-METER



An intentionally desolate take on the survival genre.



The studio's known for its puzzle games, from *The Ball*, which saw players flinging a huge sphere around an Aztec tomb, to the robotic *Unmechanical*.



Format PS4, PS Vita **Pub** NIS America
Dev Monochrome **ETA** 17 June

GRAND KINGDOM

Gold is thicker than blood

Former Vanillaware developer Tomohiko Deguchi is at the helm of this JRPG, introducing a medieval fantasy world where four nations compete for power. The player takes the lead of a small group of mercenaries, and negotiates with the different leaders for war contracts.

While the story and character dialogue quickly tire in our hands-on, the turn-based combat shines, with its focus on timing your attacks and spells, and careful positioning of your soldiers into tactical formations.

It's clear already that there's a lot of depth on offer – enough that it actually feels overwhelming at first. And with stunning 2D artwork bringing the intricate combat to life, Grand Kingdom certainly stands out in an admittedly crowded genre. **■ Ryan Jones**

GM Instant Reaction

THRILL-O-METER 1 2 3 4 5

Shaky story but intriguing combat.



Anything look familiar? Afro Samurai creator Takashi Okazaki had a hand in the design of several of the characters.

Format PS4, PC **Publisher** The Game Bakers **Developer** The Game Bakers **ETA** Summer

FURI

Limber up for some laser-focused boss-fighting

If you've ever hated your boss, this hack 'n' slash is for you. You fight nothing but bosses, each one-on-one encounter a uniquely traumatising experience. In our hands-on we stage a furious prison breakout after a benevolent rabbit releases us from the jailer who promised us an "eternity of slow, painful deaths". No thanks.

Within a circle of jagged rocks under a bubbling purple sky we meet our foe.

Motivational techno music thumps like in the final showdown of an epic RPG, but it's just the first scrap of many. Our ultra-nimble, white-haired hero slashes with a crackling blue sword, and moves and fires with twin-stick shooter grace, unleashing pure orbs of light either charged-up or as a fully-automatic stream. The jailer is just as dangerous.

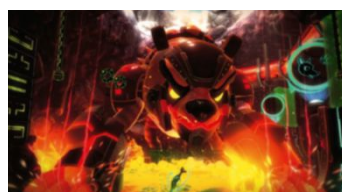
An opponent of multiple health bars and patterns, who spins his mask round to signify a style change, he shows there's more to Furi's fights than bashing buttons. Over 15 minutes we dodge-roll through his spinning staff attack, parry

during the split-second a white spark appears above his head to move in for a cinematic slash, find the slither of safe space amidst his area-of-effect explosion, and weave between thick packs of projectiles that temporarily turn the game into a bullet hell shooter. Here's where we die, hands sweating. This cosmic ladder tournament may be tough, but its tightly technical gladiatorial fights are always fair. **■ Ben Griffin**

GM Instant Reaction

THRILL-O-METER 1 2 3 4 5

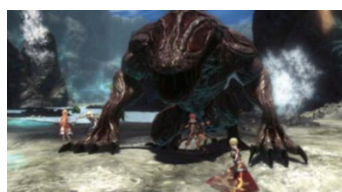
Slicing and dicing in a neon nightmare.



Format PS4, XO, Wii U, PC
Pub Good Mood Creators
Dev Good Mood Creators **ETA** Winter

MEKAZOO

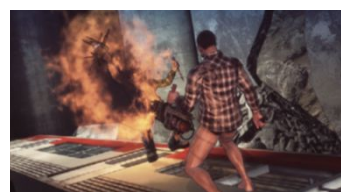
What a terrifying vision of the future – animals replaced by robots, glowing red bugs patrolling the land, and humans nowhere to be seen. Well, at least 2D platforming still exists. Using the special powers of a cybernetic frog, armadillo, wallaby, and more, we swing, roll, and hop through a neon-flecked landscape in our hands-on, bopping along to the catchy music as we switch between creatures. Unfortunately they all feel strangely erratic to control, poor fits for the precise demands of the levels. **■ RV**



Format PS4 **Pub** Bandai Namco
Dev Aquira **ETA** Autumn

SWORD ART ONLINE: HOLLOW REALIZATION

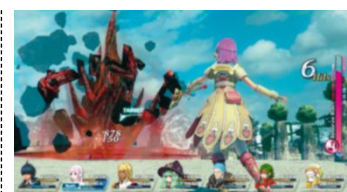
Although itself a JRPG, Sword Art Online is set within a virtual reality MMO that users log into with a headset called Nervegear. Hollow Realization aims to ape that experience by giving you up to eight party members – four human, four AI – who follow, fight, and chat. You can use the novel's hero Kirito or make your own, choosing weapons and fighting styles. Combat is tricky to get into, but the story feels authentic, thanks to development help from Reki Kawahara, author of the original manga. **■ BG**



Format PS4 **Pub** GungHo
Dev Grasshopper **ETA** Autumn

LET IT DIE

This free-to-play brawler from bonkers auteur developer Suda51 is set in the year 2043, and portrays a bleak future where swords are back in fashion. Slicing and dicing your enemies with a katana is as ridiculously over the top and bloody as a Tarantino film, and looks just as irresistibly stylish. In an intriguing twist, you'll get a malevolent second life whenever you die – after kicking the bucket, you'll manifest as an opponent in somebody else's game, using the same gear and playstyle as you did while alive in your own. **■ RJ**



Format PS4 **Pub** Square Enix
Dev Tri-Ace **ETA** 1 July

STAR OCEAN: INTEGRITY AND FAITHLESSNESS

This is essentially, the Japanese RPG genre's stab at Mass Effect, with a story revolving around undeveloped civilisations being suddenly exposed to interplanetary affairs and a party of characters who don't just follow you around bashing what you aim at, but who also stop to natter occasionally, and whose interactions with each other will mould the direction the story takes. We'll have to wait until summer to see if the stars have aligned, though. **■ MG**

GM Feature

On The Cover!

ONG • LIVE

DISHON

WE SNEAK INTO ARKANE STUDIOS
THE VERY FIRST GAMEPLAY FROM IT



DISHONORED[®] 2

WALK THROUGH THE DARK FOR AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT
THE SUPERNATURAL STEALTH SEQUEL

GM Feature

On The Cover!



Paolo runs the Howlers, and he's rumoured to possess a powerful black magic charm that protects him from harm.



n the face of it, Karnaca couldn't be more different from Dunwall. The original Dishonored spooled out its tale of treason and tyranny against the backdrop of a plague-ridden whaling port, a gloomy industrial city lit by the glow of spotlights and incendiary

arrows. But if Dunwall resembled a neo-Victorian London, Karnaca reimagines Havana and Barcelona through the same lens. The frigid fog and gloomy alleyways of the first game are gone, replaced with vibrant painted architecture, lush fauna, and buzzing insects. Blink your way to the top of a building, and you might just catch a glimpse of the ocean glittering beneath that glorious Karnacan sun.

But this setting is still very much anchored in the grubby world of Dishonored, and that midday glare illuminates desperate poverty and callous wealth alike. Ruling over this 'Jewel Of The South' is the Duke of Serkonos, an inept stripling who recently inherited the title from his father. His reign has been characterised by social unrest and ecological devastation. A case in point: he's overworked the city's silver mines to the extent that the once-vibrant Batista District is now known as the Dust District.

This sorry neighbourhood is the backdrop for our first glimpse of the game in action, and it's a sight to behold. At first glance it's a coastal paradise, surrounded by verdant woods and shimmering seas. There's even a stiff breeze to offset that searing sun, and wind turbines along the skyline put those coastal gusts to use. Take a closer look, however, and you see soldiers roaming the streets and bulbous bugs nesting in mouldering corpses. Those turbines, meanwhile, aren't powering homes - they're connected to lightning pylons and deadly force fields.



The environments of Karnaca tell a story of social unrest, with subversive graffiti splattered across buildings.

“YOUR CHOICE OF CHARACTER WILL DICTATE THE POWERS AND GEAR YOU HAVE ACCESS TO FOR THE REST OF THE GAME”

Charon the community

But that commanding view of the city isn't where we start, and although this hands-off demo casts the player as an empress, we don't get an especially regal welcome. Instead, our time with Dishonored 2 begins with a secretive boat ride towards the outskirts of our mission area. It's an introduction that fans of the first game will immediately recognise, but one by one a host of differences assert themselves. Most obvious is the conspicuous upgrade in graphical detail, and as we float along the fetid waters of this covered sewer, our hoary ferryman is strikingly illuminated by the warm glow of struggling lamplight.

Arkane's co-creative director Harvey Smith narrates the voyage, describing the game's art style as “painterly, but with realistic lighting”. He's not wrong, and the combination is marvellous in motion. As we gawp at the beauty of the rank surroundings, Smith goes on to explain that this playthrough will star Emily Kaldwin. 15 years have passed since the events of the first game - the rat plague has been resolved, Emily is 25 years old, and her reign has been a peaceful one. At the start of Dishonored 2, however, that all changes.

Smith is understandably tight-lipped on the specifics, but he eventually explains that “when you start the game, you get to see a day in the life of the Empress - for the first few minutes of



New and Void

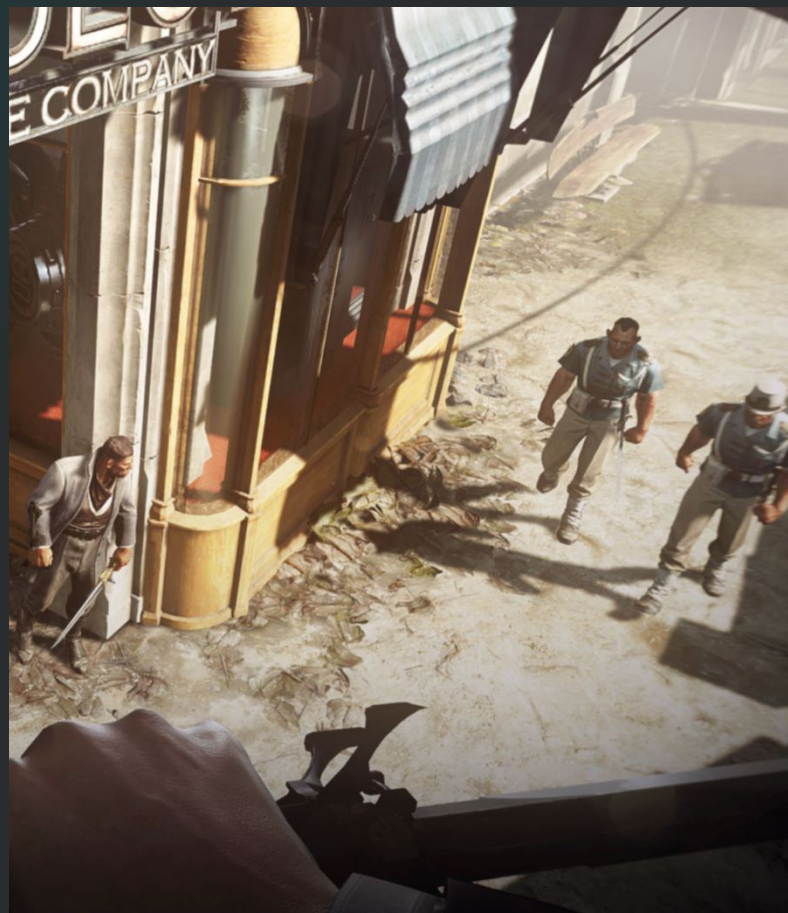
Dishonored 2 runs on a new engine designed especially for the game. The Void Engine is powered by Id Tech, but optimised for the painterly art style of Arkane's flagship franchise.

the game you're Emily. And then there's an inciting event where Emily and Corvo are literally back to back in a desperate situation, and you can move the camera around and read a little about each one, and make your choice there. And when you make your choice there, you proceed as that character". This decision will dictate the powers and gear you have access to for the rest of the game, ensuring a significantly different experience depending on whether you plump for the overthrown Empress or her ageing Lord Protector.

Back in the sewers, our shabby boatman turns to face us, and we quickly realise that this man isn't Samuel, our naval comrade from the first game. In fact it's Sokolov, the prickly polymath who jumpstarted Dunwall's industrial revolution. Exactly how

Charm offensive

Bone charms and runes return as the primary means of customising and upgrading your character. You'll also find shrines to The Outsider, which trigger a hallucinatory vision of the amoral deity.



GM Feature

On The Cover!

he came to be steering a rickety riverboat through an underground poop-pipe is unexplained, but it's clear that he represents something of a cantankerous mentor to Emily. As they drift into position, the Empress bemoans the plight of the local silver miners. Sokolov replies by pointedly asking where the palace is sourcing its sterling goblets these days.

Far out

Once Emily disembarks, she makes a regal beeline for the nearest exit. Stepping out from the dank sewer into the Karnacan sun is a spectacular moment, driving home just how much of a departure Dishonored 2 really represents from its gloomy forbear. Later, we ask Smith why Arkane decided to abandon such a well-received and expertly-assembled setting in favour of something so starkly different. "For what it's worth, we start and

end Dishonored 2 in Dunwall," he replies. "It took a lot of extra work to support two locations – I think most game teams would've cut the second location or the first location, and we stuck to our guns. We said no, we need to start it at home, in Dunwall, and then venture out into an exotic place and come back."

Ultimately, though, at least part of the motivation behind the shift boils down to "the team's desire to show another corner of our Empire". Whatever the justification, any fears that sunnier climes might stifle the series' supernatural stealth are quickly quelled. Once Emily's eyes have adjusted to the light, she equips Far Reach, and fires a grotesque tendril into some shadowy cover nearby. It pulls her into place in a heartbeat, in a manner much like Corvo's Blink ability from the first game.

"Initially, we saw it as: can we make an alternate to Blink that doesn't just feel like a cosmetically-differentiated Blink?" explains



Q&A

Co-creative director Harvey Smith tells all

Why relocate from Dunwall to an entirely new setting?

You know, we have this Empire that we allude to constantly – our lore is much bigger than the game, always. So we wanted to go down to Serkonos, where Corvo is from. He's ageing and he's going home and he's wondering how long he can protect his daughter and wondering how much his homeland has changed.

How has Emily changed in the interlude since the first game?

We had to think: well what would 15 more years of living in Dunwall Tower with the best educators do?

She's shaken by her mother's death, of course, but closer to Corvo and being trained by him.

He has this mentality of "hey, look, someday our enemies are going to come for you with knives and I want you to be ready".

How has the studio been affected by the first game's success?

It's interesting, because in some cases I can speak very personally here. I felt like I was on the ropes

when I signed on with Arkane eight years ago and Dishonored was a real shot in the arm for me.

Just having that response from fans that we did something they really liked, you know, the players.

So I would say that the biggest answer to your question is that it impacted us emotionally. It revived our spirits. 'Hey, there are other people out there that like games like we like' and that's a big part of it I think.



The Duke of Serkonos himself can be heard blaring through Karnaca's loudspeakers, ranting about enemies of the state.



Head games

When designing characters, the Dishonored 2 art team regularly produces clay sculptures to get a better sense of how the facial features will appear in three dimensions. A collection of these clay busts were recently exhibited in a Parisian art gallery.



“WITHOUT WARNING, THE WIND PICKS UP AND A DUST STORM CLOSES IN, CARRYING GRIT ON A TEMPESTUOUS BREEZE”



Your visions of The Void and The Outsider are stranger and more disconcerting than before.



Smith. “But [Far Reach] feels very different. Whereas Blink almost feels like a teleport – time is slowed a little bit and you move very rapidly through the world – Far Reach feels much more like you reach out into space, you attach onto the wall or the floor, and you’re pulled through the world.” For now, the power enables Emily to zip around the stage, moving from vertiginous vantage points into the stark pools of shadow cast by the tropical sun.

Once we’re suitably hidden, there’s a decision to be made. That’s because each and every mission in Dishonored 2 presents the player with some kind of ‘theming’, either in terms of fiction or mechanics. The shifting clockwork mansion seen in the game’s E3 2015 announcement trailer was one elaborate example of that, and Harvey assures us that CGI video closely represents a stage that will appear in the final game. On this level, however, the mechanical gimmick is the availability of two separate assassination targets to pursue, each the head of an embittered rival faction.

On the one hand, there’s Vice Overseer Byrne, a religious authoritarian who leads the local chapter of the Abbey Of The Everyman. And on the other there’s Paolo, the charismatic head of a band of thugs and ruffians known as The Howler Gang. Both possess information vital to our overarching goals, but neither will co-operate with Emily while the other lives. We take one look at a typical Howler – a hulking bruiser wielding a giant pair of tailor’s scissors – and decide it’s our moral obligation to remove the tyrannical Vice Overseer from power.

Done and dusted

To do so, however, Emily will have to weasel her way past a nearby guard outpost. She dutifully observes the patrol patterns, carefully moves into position, and... then something unexpected happens. Without warning, the wind picks up and a dust storm closes in, carrying grit and grime from the silver mines on a tempestuous breeze. Fortunately, Emily’s eyesight is rather better than the patrolling lookouts, and she takes advantage of the foul weather to non-lethally choke a few chumps.

“We heard consistently, over and over: ‘hey, I wanted more non-lethal options. There are so many lethal powers and I wanted a few more [non-lethal],’” explains Smith. “So we have a non-lethal drop attack, where you fall on somebody and you can knock them out instead of murdering them. And we have a combat choke, so when you throw people off-balance in combat, instead of just assassinating them with a fatality you can [karate] chop them in the throat and pull them around and render them unconscious.” In practice, these merciful moves can feel almost more brutal than their bloody counterparts, and Emily’s non-lethal drop attack draws a wince from us upon impact.

Now, with this guard outpost resembling nothing so much as an impromptu siesta, she beats a hasty retreat, and we



Emily Kaldwin

Trained from childhood by Corvo, she's a fearsome assassin in her own right, with her own occult powers

Fifteen years have passed since Emily inherited the throne, but now she's lost it all. The events of her downfall remain a closely-guarded secret, but we know that despite being on the run, she's determined to get back what was taken from her.

The young former empress will face all manner of opposition and adversity in sunny Karnaca, to be sure, but she'll also see how the downtrodden citizens of the Empire she ruled over actually live. As such, her journey could provide a vivid lesson in the failings of her own leadership.

Mesmerize

Emily has the power to summon an angular apparition out of thin air, drawing the rapt attention of nearby enemies. While they stand transfixed, you're able to sneak past or get stab-happy as you please, making it a versatile tool for lethal and non-lethal playthroughs alike.

Domino

This ability lets Emily link enemies so they share a common fate. In other words: what happens to one Dominoed thug will happen to them all. That means you can take out a group of foes with a single assassination, or knock a foe off a sheer cliff by staggering his nearby mate.

Far Reach

This is more than just Emily's answer to Blink. Okay, so it lets you zip around the levels and hop onto rooftops with ease, but this phantom tendrill also lets you grab items from a distance or even pick up enemies and fling them towards you for an easy assassination.

Doppelganger

Emily summons an ethereal double that's indistinguishable from the real deal. Enemies will chase it, battle it, and even believe you're dead once they kill it. Depending on how you allocate your upgrade runes, Doppelganger can be a tool for distraction or a deadly ally.

soon find ourselves in neutral territory of a kind that didn't really exist in the original Dishonored. In this lively safe haven we witness a gaggle of rowdy roustabouts throwing dice in the dirt while onlookers loiter on the fringes of the game. A black market store would normally present an opportunity for players to upgrade their weapons, but a duo of dead-eyed gangbangers are putting the screws on its owner for protection money. And then there's the common-or-garden Karnacans, trading welcomes and gossip in these ramshackle avenues.

Dust up

It's a far cry from the deserted streets of Dunwall, and this sociable space is just one part of the Dust District's complex geography. Levels are no longer parcelled up into discrete sections, too. There're no loading screens to disrupt your path through these detailed neighbourhoods - each level represents a single, expansive environment. Emily sets off in search of Byrne, free to begin the hunt without a single break in the action.

Once she crosses the line into Overseer territory, things take a turn for the totalitarian. Although she Far Reaches from roof to

Voice of treason

Arkane has once again assembled an enviable voice cast. Vice Overseer Byrne is voiced by Jamie Hector, *The Outsider* has been recast as Gotham's Robin Lord Taylor, and Paolo is performed by *Narcos* star Pedro Pascal.



roof, making quick, clandestine progress in the direction of her quarry, her attention is soon drawn by the pious sermonising of a group of Abbey zealots. The masked men stand, guns drawn, in front of a gaggle of terrified civilians. "You stand accused of actions forbidden by the teachings of the Abbey Of The Everyman," recites one. "No trial is required. For theft of food, for hindering a sworn Overseer of the Abbey in his duties, death is..."

The militant hasn't even finished speaking when the shimmering tendrill of Emily's fully-upgraded Far Reach latches onto him. There's a beat, and then the spectral appendage snaps back, flinging the fanatic through the air and onto the tip of her waiting blade. A few explosive bullets, fired from her ornate pistol, are enough to dispatch the remaining Abbey opposition.

The entire encounter has lasted only 20 seconds or so, but it's enough to convince us that Far Reach really is no simple substitute for Corvo's Blink ability. Sure, Emily can use the power to scabble onto ledges or cross open spaces at lickety-split speeds, but at its higher levels Far Reach also enables you to grab hold of items and enemies before flinging them towards you. The implications for long-range thievery are obvious, but the power's handy in a scrap, too. Find yourself outnumbered and you might pull a tank of volatile whale oil your way, dodge, then turn around to spectate its explosive collision.

But as versatile as the power undoubtedly is, as she steps into a clearing in front of Byrne's monastic headquarters it becomes clear that a different approach will be required. The space is simply crawling with standing sentries and patrolling guards, their blades and barrels glimmering in the sun.



"THE MILITANT HASN'T EVEN FINISHED SPEAKING WHEN HER SHIMMERING TENDRIL LATCHES ONTO HIM"



Corvo Attano

He's got a few more grey hairs these days, but the years haven't made him soft – he's as deadly as ever

It was hinted at in the first game, but now it's confirmed – Corvo Attano is Emily Kaldwin's father. And ever since his child inherited the throne, Corvo has dedicated his life to training her and keeping her safe.

Karnaca is actually Corvo's homeland – after the death of his lumber worker father, he grew up on its grimy streets – so Dishonored 2 represents something of a homecoming for the ageing character. Whether the region remains as he remembers it, however, is another matter...

Devouring Swarm

A supernatural swarm of rats is always handy in a pinch, whether you're looking to dispose of a body or turn the tide of a battle. Now, you'll be able to upgrade the power so that you summon more rats or even additional swarms to create a fleabitten army.

Possession

In the original Dishonored, Corvo could use Possession to take control of animals (and later, people) in the environment in order to get closer to his target. Now, you're able to chain a series of Possessions together, hopping from one creature to another in pursuit of your quarry.

Blink Kick

Corvo can still use his Blink ability to zip around unseen and reach useful vantage points, of course, but more aggressive players can now put the power to offensive use, closing the gap between attackers in an instant and delivering a hefty boot to the face before they know what's happening.

Bend Time

You'll once again be able to upgrade Bend Time to the point that it stops time altogether, freezing your enemies in place for a limited time. This time, though, you'll be able to hold a button in order to advance time bit-by-bit. Dead useful for lining up crossbow trick shots.



The Serkonan Guard use wind turbines to power their deadly Arc Pylons and Walls Of Light.

This scenario proves the perfect place to deploy another of Emily's new powers: Mesmerize. The Empress extends her hand and an angular monolith springs into place in the midst of these vigilant guards. Every enemy in the area stands awestruck, unable to do anything but gaze dumbly at the shifting grey-black surface of this magical apparition. While the sentries stare and stutter, she seizes the opportunity to slip by entirely unnoticed.

Byrne baby Byrne

Then comes the assassination. Emily stalks into the Vice Overseer's office to find him lecturing a trio of well-armed underlings. The holy man speaks in a forceful but even tone, briefing his fellow zealots on his plans to eradicate the Howler Gang, and illustrating each point with another grainy slide from a rickety old overhead projector. As the insufferable cenobite drones on, Emily equips her Domino power – which allows you to link enemies so that whatever happens to one, happens to every other – and uses it to magically tether the three monastic thugs who block her path to the target.

At this point, a crossbow bolt to the head of one would see all three crumple to the floor, but that approach seems a little brutish for an Empress. Instead, she affixes a stun grenade to the Vice Overseer's projector, flips the power switch, and then creeps into cover nearby. One of the masked monks dutifully strolls over to investigate the malfunction, sets off the non-lethal explosive, and suddenly her target is the only man left standing.

At this point, discretion goes out the window. Emily steps out into the open before activating Shadow Walk, which sees

Doctor doctor

Anton Sokolov and Piero Joplin became best buds by the end of the first game, merging their competing remedies to create a definitive cure for the plague. As such, the health tonics in Dishonored 2 are labelled 'S&J Health Elixir'.



GM Feature

On The Cover!

The clockwork soldiers seen in the E3 trailer have undergone a redesign – they're now made of wood rather than ceramic, reflecting local natural resources.



History telling

Smith tells us that the original Dishonored was modelled on the real world of 1837, albeit with significant changes. Dishonored 2, meanwhile, takes inspiration from the architectural forms, popular fashions, and far-out technologies of 1851.



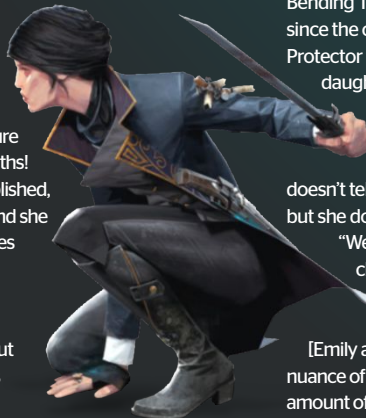
“THERE’S THIS SENSE THAT HE KEEPS SECRETS FROM HER. HE’S MARKED BY THE OUTSIDER, HE’S A SORCERER”

her transform into a cloud of shifting smoke. Vice Overseer Byrne recoils in horror, but it’s too late. A pair of powerful arms emerge from this malevolent cloud to pluck Byrne from his feet, and she tears the man limb from limb.

Next thing you know, she’s nonchalantly slinging the Overseer’s body over her shoulder, and this grim trophy suffices to grant her entry to Howler-controlled territory. In fact, they practically roll out the red carpet for her, ushering our undercover Empress in to meet their leader, Paolo, who stands savouring a drink behind a well-stocked bar. He greets the arrival of his nemesis’ corpse with some measure of surprise. “I’ve been trying to bring Byrne down for months! You did what others couldn’t do.” Emily’s excellence established, Paolo hands over a stack of vital info on her next target, and she prepares to bid the Dust District a fond farewell for pastures (and targets) new.

Cor blimey

Later, we experience the same level for a second time, but this time we’re looking through Corvo’s eyes as he stalks Karnaca’s sunlit streets, Blinking between rooftops and



Bending Time on a whim. Smith explains that in the 15 years since the original game, Corvo has been serving as Lord Protector to Emily Kaldwin, now unambiguously identified as his daughter. In that time, he’s trained her well, but there’s also a certain distance in their relationship. “There’s this sense that he keeps secrets from her,” Smith tells us. “He’s marked by the Outsider, he’s a sorcerer – he doesn’t tell anyone that. And so she knows he has some secrets, but she doesn’t know what they are exactly.

“We fictionalise all the time: there was that time she was up climbing around on the roof and fell and should have died. But in the blink of an eye, somehow, Corvo was there and helped her get to the balcony.

[Emily asks] ‘How did you do that?’ And he doesn’t answer.” The nuance of this father-daughter relationship lends a certain amount of shading to a character who spent the first game as



Tourist trap

The best holiday of your life
– and death



Whether you're looking for lush forests, pristine beaches, or stern religious orders, Karnaca truly has it all. Spend your days basking in the sun and your evenings sipping fig wine in one of the city's many upscale bars and restaurants. Just be sure to find your way back to the hotel before curfew*, you night-owls!
*(Failure to comply with 9pm curfew will result in summary execution.)



Karnaca isn't just a holiday resort, it's also a booming commercial centre, and home to the Empire's largest natural deposits of silver. Step outside and you can practically taste that Karnacan entrepreneurial spirit, thanks to the constant miasma of dust and particulate produced by our large-scale mining operations!



Karnaca's distinctive flora and fauna is rightly admired throughout the Empire. Thanks to a recent spike in the Bloodfly population, there's never been a better time to learn more about these fascinating creatures and their unique breeding habits!

something of a blank slate, as does the introduction of full voice-acting to the heretofore silent protagonist.

"I've never seen Bloodflies this bad", Corvo mutters as he clambers into a condemned building in search of a shady shortcut. The voice will immediately ring a bell with stealth aficionados, since Garrett himself (also known as Stephen Russell) has taken on the role. Initially, though, the voiceover is simply jarring. Anyone who's played the original Dishonored has spent hours building an image of this character in their minds, and so it's perhaps inevitable that there's some dissonance to overcome initially. It's clear, however, that this is no half-hearted addition.

"We experimented with voice during the Dishonored DLC – Daud could speak. And so, in the new game, Corvo is fully voiced, Emily is fully voiced, and they have emotional reactions to things. You get a better sense of who they are, based on their upbringing, their history," Smith tells us. "And often their comments are gated based on whether it's Corvo or Emily, but also whether it's low chaos, high chaos, or very high chaos. There are objects scattered all through the world that you can walk up and interact with to have a comment that is then gated on those – there's six possible lines there. And so we do that all through the world to give you a sense of... to reflect what you're doing, how you're playing, and who you are."

Flying the nest

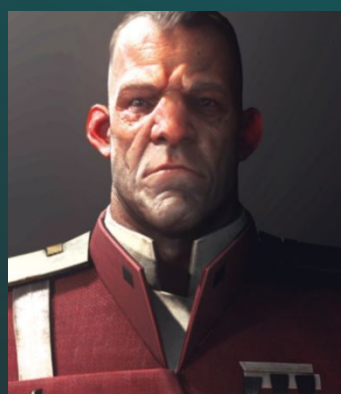
Once Corvo shuts his trap, he heads deeper into the Bloodfly lair. Above is their nest, a grotesque protrusion of ruby-red honeycomb emerging from the tasteful cornicing of this once-lavish home. "Bloodflies respond to quick movement, sound, and proximity," Smith cautions. "And if you get close to the nest, they get very agitated." Corvo attempts to creep around the fringes of this buzzing hive, but bumps right into another threat – a Nestkeeper. These hideous humanoid figures are infested with swarms of the parasitic insects, and stand guard around their breeding grounds.

Corvo immediately uses his Bend Time ability to freeze the gruesome sentries and their buzzing allies in place as he deploys another familiar power – Devouring Swarm. A horde of ravenous vermin erupts from the floor, but for now, both rat and Bloodfly alike remain perfectly still. "We always found that it was nice to see things moving in slow motion, and sometimes you have a reason for wanting to advance time a little bit," Smith explains. "So now, even if you upgrade Bend Time so that you can fully stop time, you can hold a key and advance time a little bit."

So, with the touch of a button, this frozen tableau springs into a frenzy of slow-motion activity, as Corvo's rodent confederates leap at the Nestkeeper with wild eyes and gnashing fangs. But all this commotion has agitated the hive, and poor Corvo is quickly swarmed by an army of oversized bugs. In a last-ditch bid for freedom, he equips Possession, and before we know it, we find ourselves in the mind of a Bloodfly as he attempts to steer the grossly bloated parasite away from the carnage. Once he's established his bearings, Bloodfly-Corvo is soon able to buzz out of a nearby window unmolested, abandoning his loyal vermin pals to their certain fate.

That didn't go quite as planned, but the upshot of all that mayhem is that we're now deep inside Howler territory and one step closer to the target – Paolo. Unfortunately, a herd of Howlers who had been sunning themselves in this courtyard has just witnessed a Bloodfly flutter out of a building and transform into a middle-aged man before their very eyes. Understandably vexed, they decide to attack rather than investigate further.

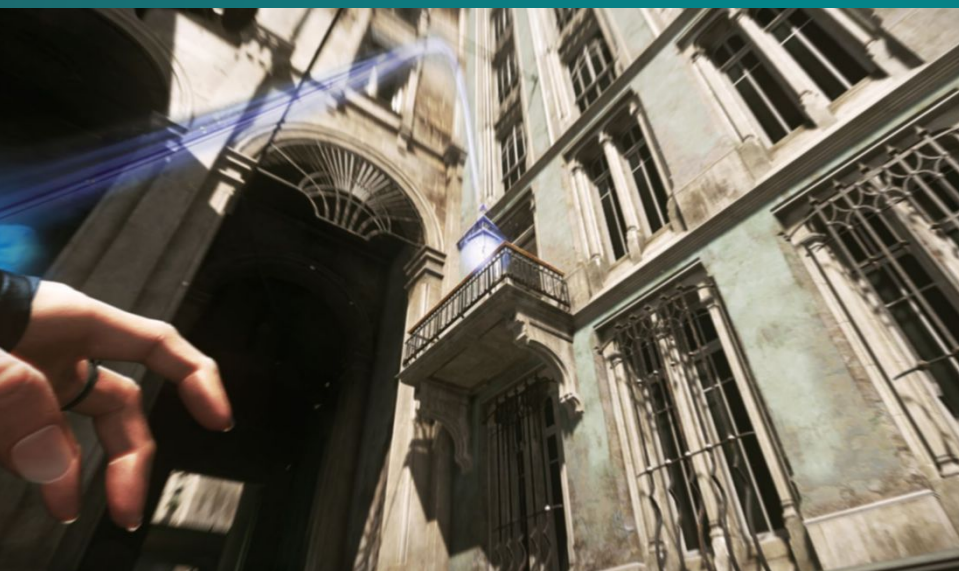
The altercation is an opportunity for Smith to walk us through some of the improvements to Dishonored's simple but satisfying brand of melee combat. The introduction of a Focus Strike, for instance, enables players to break through enemy blocks by holding the attack button. Similarly, the Blink Kick sees Corvo utilise his abilities to cover ground at supernatural speed



GM Feature

On The Cover!

“THE GROTESQUE INSECTS
ARE NATIVE TO KARNACA,
AN EVER PRESENT FEATURE
OF LIFE IN THE SOUTH”



before landing a fearsome boot to a startled Howler's face, leaving the goon staggered for our lethal followup. With this enhanced range of abilities, Corvo makes short work of his hoodlum foes, and takes a moment to survey the scene.

Corpses lie scattered across the courtyard, their bloodstains gleaming in the midday sun. A solitary Bloodfly - a straggler from the nearby nest, no doubt - hovers in the air nearby. Smith explains that the grotesque insects are native to Karnaca, an ever-present feature of life in the South, but thanks to the Duke's brutal use of firing squads to curb dissent at street level, the infestation has become worse than it's ever been before. "Bloodflies lay eggs in corpses," Smith explains. "So the more corpses you leave in the city, the more infestations there are." As such, the insects are not only another enemy type - they're also a symptom of the ongoing unrest in Karnaca, as well as a gentle mechanical incentive towards non-lethal play.

Lead game designer Dinga Bakaba illustrates the point with an anecdote from playtesting. "Sometimes you kill a lot of people but you didn't see that there were just two or three bloodflies flying around," he says. "You go and you do your mission, and when you come back to that same area, suddenly it's infested." Fortunately, before Corvo's immoderate killing spree has time to properly backfire on him, our demo is over.

All systems go

Although we're relieved that we won't have to deal with a billowing swarm of Bloodflies, it occurs to us that it's exactly this interaction between game systems that lent the original Dishonored a good deal of its appeal. Throughout our time with

Corvo will once again be able to activate Dark Vision in order to peer through walls while monitoring guard patrol patterns and sightlines.



Empress pass

Although Emily was voiced by Chloë Grace Moretz in the original game, her adult dialogue is capably delivered by Erica Luttrell, who's most recently provided voices for *Fallout 4* and cartoon *Steven Universe*.



The Dreadful Wale

Always wanted to live by the sea? Look no further than Emily and Corvo's new nautical HQ



Depending on what part of the ship you're standing in, you'll hear gulls circling overhead, the rumble of the engine room, or the strain of the Wale's hull.

The steamer is roomy inside, with quarters for many of your friends and allies. You'll be able to have a natter in your downtime, of course.

The Dreadful Wale is Dishonored 2's equivalent of The Hound Pits pub – a hub environment that you'll return to between missions.

The ship is captained by Meagan Foster, a key ally who's voiced by actress Rosario Dawson of *Sin City* and *Daredevil* fame.



You'll be able to stand on the deck and admire Arkane's ocean tech, as well as the enormous whales breaching off the coast.

the sequel, in fact, various Arkane staffers refer to the game as a 'simulation'. But rather than implying a dreary subservience to real-world plausibility, they use this term to denote the fact that Dishonored relies far more on the complex interplay of mechanics than on any sort of scripting trickery.

This lends the game an air of unpredictability, for both player and developer alike. "I can tell you a story that [happened] just today while we were in the team room," Bakaba explains. "I received an email with a video, and in that video [a developer] is using Blink Kick in a certain configuration and the target explodes into gibs. And he's like, 'do we keep this?' And I can't give you the answer right now, because I have to think about it," he laughs.

Yes men

There is, however, a set of guiding principles that the team uses when issues like this arise. "Usually, what happens in those cases is we wonder: is it fun? That's question number one. Does it break the game? That's question number two. Is it goofy? Because some goofiness is okay, some isn't. And then, lastly, how much work it is to polish it so that it doesn't look like a bug anymore. An answer to all those questions is important before we decide," Bakaba tells us.

"But in general, the main motto at Arkane is: say yes to the player." That's clearly a slogan that has served the studio well in recent years, and Dishonored 2 looks set to offer players more flexibility and freedom than ever before thanks to its enhanced range of powers, abilities, and systems. Come 11 November, we suspect Karnaca will be absolutely inundated with happy holidaymakers sneaking in the sun. **James Nouch**

Butterfly effect

The Chaos system from the first game returns for the sequel. Your choice to either deal with enemies and targets non-lethally, or massacre anyone in your path, will have a lasting impact on the world around you.





The game has a top-down view to give you a better understanding of your surroundings as you sneak around.

Who is...

PARANOID PRODUCTIONS

Richard Rouse III has an impressive CV of triple-A titles. He was the creative director at Surreal Software where he was creative lead and writer on the *The Suffering* games. Plus he was design lead at Microsoft on titles such as *Sunset Overdrive* and *Quantum Break*.

Format PS4, Xbox One, PC Developer Paranoid Productions ETA 2017 Web <http://bit.ly/gmchurchdarkness>

#1 THE CHURCH IN THE DARKNESS

Don't expect this religion to give you a faith lift

Sometimes the beauty of games is their distance from the real world. Exploring the rural lifestyle of *Stardew Valley* without getting mud on your shoes, or being able to have a nice cup of tea after all that bullet dodging in *Superhot*. Then there are the games that draw you into very real ethical dilemmas. *The Church In The Darkness* is one of these, and we hope you're ready for more shades of (morally) grey than an EL James novel.

Valley without getting mud on your shoes, or being able to have a nice cup of tea after all that bullet dodging in *Superhot*. Then there are the games that draw you into very real ethical dilemmas. *The Church In The Darkness* is one of these, and we hope you're ready for more shades of (morally) grey than an EL James novel.

Welcome to the *not sinister at all* Freedom Town in South America. You've arrived as Vic, an ex-lawman on his way to check on his sister's son, Alex, who has joined a religious cult called The Collective Justice Mission. Given that this all takes place in the 1970s, there's more than a hint of the Jonestown suicide cult, a tragic and potentially touchy piece of recent history. "There's inspiration from Jonestown for sure - but also from many other extreme groups and cults, specifically from the US in the 1970s," confirms director Richard Rouse III. "I find that time period fascinating - people were really losing faith in conventional society and were looking for new ways to live. And some of those worked well and some of them really didn't. I'm fascinated in the differences between those groups that lead to such wildly different outcomes. I saw that there were multiple sides to these scenarios, that they were always more complex than they appear at first. And I thought a game with a dynamic, shifting narrative was the

perfect way to explore the many sides of these extreme groups."

GLADOS tidings

Freedom Town, viewed from a top-down perspective, is open to explore as you quest to find Alex, and how you infiltrate the compound is entirely up to you. You can go in all guns blazing, but there are innocent families living on site - can you risk collateral damage? Add in the married cult leaders, voiced by none other than real life husband and wife duo Ellen McLain (GLaDOS from *Portal*) and John Patrick Lowrie (*Team Fortress 2*'s Sniper), booming propaganda over the loudspeakers and the experience is entirely unique.

"It's definitely morally ambiguous territory - so much so that you don't know from playthrough to playthrough how good or bad cult leaders Isaac and Rebecca really are," explains Rouse. "In fact, in some scenarios the cult leaders will be at odds with each other, and you'll need to find out which one of them is still trying to do the right thing and which



The discovery of brochures, letters and documents will be key to uncovering what's truly at work in Freedom Town. Don't expect a happy ending.

"THE GAME DIVES INTO SOME VERY DARK SUBJECT MATTER - BUT IT'S NOT JUST DARK FOR THE SAKE OF IT"



The roles of the cult leaders Isaac and Rebecca were written for veteran voice actors Ellen McLain and John Lowrie, and the pair would often talk about the characters when Rouse wasn't around to suggest ideas.



Crafty players can get in and out unseen, but where would be the fun in that? Just don't expect your trespassing to be taken lightly.

one has more apocalyptic plans for the people of the cult.

"That's why I find this such an interesting setting for a game - it's super hard to tell from the outside whether these extreme progressive groups are good or bad. So as an outsider infiltrating this group, the player is treading into morally murky waters, trying to figure out what to think of these leaders, and then decide what to do with them based on that."

Freedom Town is full of different ways to play and explore but Rouse wants us to experience the story naturally through discovery amongst the cabins. "The game is a top-down action infiltration experience at its core, so I wanted to keep the player as active as possible while they're exploring the world and navigating the threats they encounter," he explains. "I wanted the narrative to be completely integrated with the gameplay, not something you only get between the

gameplay. So having you get a lot of the story via voiceover while playing felt very natural with the setting and also means that you're playing the whole time."

Cult following

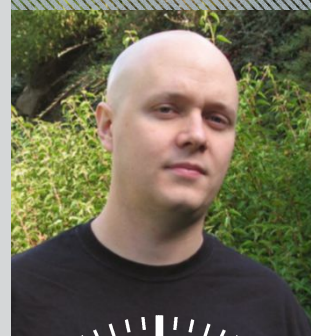
Clues to what's going on can be found in letters and documents as well as the voices of the cult leaders, but how you deal with it all is entirely up to you. "Do you go and rescue your relative and take them out of camp? What happens to all the other followers that you leave behind? What if your nephew wants to stay behind, do you let him?" Rouse quizzes. "What happens to

Freedom Town after you leave is part of the ending you get as well, and there are lots of different ways it can play out. It's a systems-based game, so the player can take on threats using non-lethal methods or by killing people, or particularly crafty players can avoid detection completely."



Rouse has built a career crafting the hellscapes of *The Suffering* and *The Suffering 2: The Ties That Bind*, but this is a different kind of terrifying. "Obviously those games were unabashedly horror games, and in them players fought some twisted and dark creatures. But when I wrote *The Suffering* games, I wanted to explore not only the supernatural horror but also real-world horrors that came out of our setting - like the reality of the American prison system and the death penalty," he explains.

"Obviously *The Church In The Darkness* isn't horror and it doesn't have any supernatural elements, but it still dives into some very dark subject matter. But it's not just dark for the sake of it - with the shifting narrative I wanted players to get to see both sides of how events can play out. In my research, so often I have read stories from cult survivors, where they say 'it's not as simple as you think. There was good and bad. We weren't just brainwashed'. The *Church In The Darkness* isn't a documentary, but I want to fill it with believable characters you can empathize with, even in the darkest moments, even when they're making terrible decisions." All we can say is amen to that. ■



The 60 Second Pitch

Sneaking in for a chat with Richard Rouse III

The *Church In The Darkness* is set inside a religious cult in the 1970s. The *Collective Justice Mission* preaches a radical progressive agenda and feels persecuted in the US. So Isaac and Rebecca Walker move their congregation to the jungles of South America, and there they build *Freedom Town*. That's where you come in. As Vic, an ex-law enforcement officer, you set out to infiltrate *Freedom Town* to find your nephew, Alex. The game features top-down action infiltration gameplay where you play however you want - avoid detection completely, incapacitate the guards non-lethally, or kill anyone who gets in your way. It's highly replayable, with gameplay that changes every time, but also changing narrative - the motivations of the Walkers vary each game, so you don't know if they want to live peacefully in the jungle, or if they're more apocalyptic. Voicing the roles of Rebecca and Isaac are two veteran actors and real-life married couple, Ellen McLain (GLaDOS from *Portal*) and John Patrick Lowrie (Sniper from *TF2*).

Format PS4, PC Developer Drool ETA Summer Web <http://bit.ly/gmthumper>

#2 THUMPER

Murder on the dancefloor

How do you like your rhythm games? Loud? Energetic? Watching you with the disappointed eyes of your fellow bandmates? No? How about violent? That's how ex-Harmonix devs Marc Flury and Brian Gibson have labelled this unique experience in sound and neon visuals that stars a space beetle speeding furiously towards a giant head from the future. Read on and it'll all start making sense, we promise.

"For a long time, we had a hard time describing Thumper. Then we found that 'rhythm violence' works as an effective and succinct description," explains Flury. "Thumper is a rhythm game, but it's unique in that we keep the gameplay simple so we can ratchet the speed and intensity way up. We want it to feel violent in ways that other music games are not. By violent we don't mean blood or gore. We mean an experience that is overwhelming, brutal, and occasionally jarring."

Rhythm hell

Don't expect a story or really any explanation for the madness on screen at all - don't worry, you'll be far too busy traversing levels full of coiling tracks, deadly obstacles, and shrieking enemies to worry about it. Everything is a threat, and it's all set to an astonishing, ear-searing soundtrack. "We always wanted to create something with a dark and intense vibe. We wanted Thumper to look and sound different than other games or really anything else," Flury says. "As for the audio, we let it grow organically out of our gameplay experiments. Rather than creating 'songs' and fitting



Thumper has been a labour of love for two-man team Drool - they've been working on it for seven years now.

gameplay to them, like most rhythm games, we did the opposite. We made mechanics and levels first and let them determine what the game should sound like."

While you can play Thumper with a standard controller and TV set up, it's also fully VR compatible for new levels of aural and visual insanity. "When we started making Thumper, quality VR was just a wild fantasy, so we designed most of the game without VR in mind," explains Flury. "To be honest, we're fortunate Thumper works so well in VR. We had little idea what it would be like until we actually tried it. The benefits of VR for Thumper are what you'd probably expect: heightened intensity and immersion. We focus on using VR technology as a means to overwhelm the player with speed and bombard them with intense visuals." Are we ready for that? Er, not sure. Are we excited to find out? Hell yes. ■



This delightful fellow is called Crakhead. You'll have to dodge around his spiny tentacles to defeat him.

Small... But Perfectly Formed

The best upcoming indie virtual reality games



#1

I EXPECT YOU TO DIE

This tricky puzzler pops you into the most dangerous of Bond-style life-or-death situations and asks you to escape. Given the amount of ways to end your days in the deadly car demo alone - ah, a ticking time bomb, of course - this Oculus experience's title is maybe too accurate.



#2

100 FOOT ROBOT GOLF

If those four words weren't enough, perhaps the promise of destroying entire cities in the name of a hole in one will be. Yes, this PSVR title does exactly what it says on the tin, has a full campaign mode, and even takes you to the moon to try out golfing without gravity.



#3

WORLD WAR TOONS

Can you make a cartoony Call Of Duty? That's what this bloodless WW2 shooter has in its sights. While you'll have your standard weaponry such as sniper rifles and rocket launchers, power-ups across the maps will contain rideable rockets, radioactive auras, and pianos that drop onto foes from the sky.



#4

POLLEN

In space, no one can hear you play with everything in the cargo dock. While Pollen pops you in the shoes of a mechanic on Saturn's moon, Titan, if you want to ignore the narrative and interact with all the toys on Station M that's fine too. We're not telling you how long we played with the arcade game.



#5

HOVER JUNKERS

This explosive multiplayer shooter takes a unique approach to VR movement, putting you at the helm of a floating hover-platform. Build scrap onto it to turn it into a custom mobile fort, then physically duck and cover as you blast enemies with dual pistols, shotguns, and uzis. ■



Format PC Developer Xaviant ETA Summer Web <http://bit.ly/gmculling>

#3 THE CULLING

Battle Royale with cheese

Just 20 minutes. That's all you've got to take down 15 opponents in an enormous arena of death

where there can only be one winner (or, less dramatically, two if you're in team mode). It's your time to shine in the world's biggest web show. Or perhaps it's your time to die with an axe embedded in the back of your skull? The Hunger Games' legal team will probably be on the case any minute now, but until then, you can leap into this brutal survival game in Early Access for a perfect mix of madness and carnage.

It's by no means a new format, but this combo of Battle Royale with a healthy dose of survival-style crafting is tense and a ridiculous amount of fun even in its currently incomplete form. From the moment you're let out into the arena, scavenging for the best possible tools of death is key. While there are exciting loot drops to find full of shiny new weapons - announced with the tongue in cheek

call of "grab your package" - it's making your own stuff that's going to keep you alive until you earn your way to the good hauls.

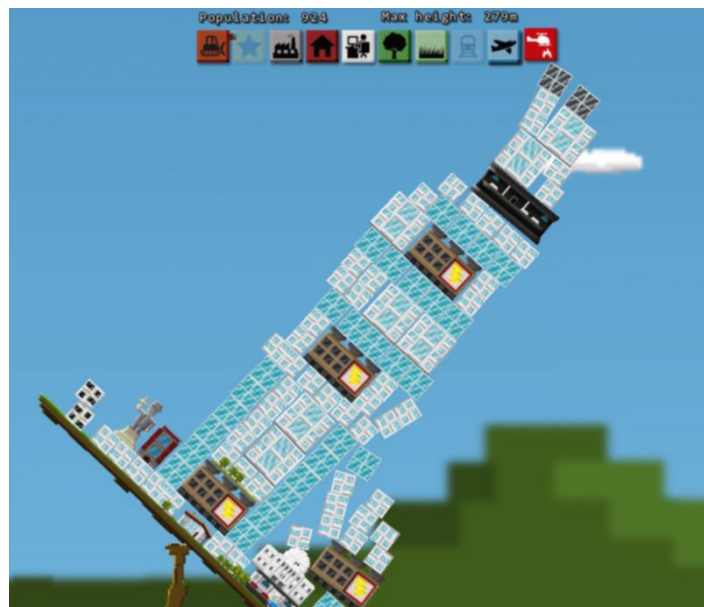
Mocking play

You'll find yourself chipping rocks into crude knives and scrabbling to find enough branches to build your first Katniss-style bow, all while desperately dodging death. You haven't felt true tension until you've wrapped twine around a bit of flint while murderous psychopaths hunt you down with chainsaws.

As time ticks by, the arena changes and closes areas, forcing competitors to head to the middle and battle it out - and there's plenty of ways to do that. As long as you've earned a good stash of universal crafting currency FUNC, you can set snares, toss dynamite, fire poison darts, and fill your foes full of arrows - but you'll have to make sure you've been constantly exploring to find the goods you need for the killing. But don't worry, the cheery sense of humour to the writing will keep you from getting too stressed out. ■



You'll have to pillage every location for key items. You might even find a Man Tracker device that'll help you hunt your closest competitor/victim.



Format PC, Mobile Developer Fernando Cordoba ETA Summer Web <http://bit.ly/gmbalancity>

#4 BALANCITY

With great tower comes great responsibility

When you once thought it was only in our wildest cheese dreams that Jenga and Sim City would hit it off on Tinder and have a wild night together, but here's their love-child, plain as day - a physics-based puzzle game that sees you building a metropolis on top of a precarious platform.

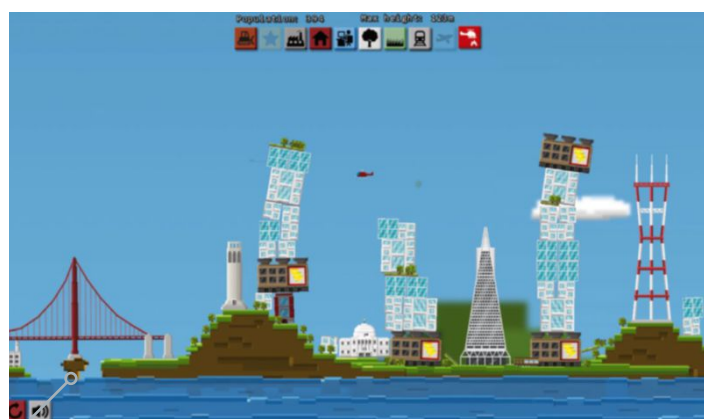
Not only do you need to keep it from plummeting into the abyss, but it also has to function as any city should, despite foundations that make the San Andreas fault look like the perfect location to hold the World Card Tower Building Championships.

Just like in any city builder, your settlements need offices, houses, and power plants all while teetering on the edge of oblivion. Residents require power and jobs, and they really like having clean air to breathe too, so trees are essential. Even transport links are required for more people to move in. Trains, planes, and buses are all available, even if it does look like most sane humans would probably prefer some stairs or terra firma.

High times

There's an, err, stack of game modes too, from free-build to 'real life scenario' challenges in which you recreate cities such as San Francisco. We never (see) saw this coming. ■

"BUILDING A TOWN ON TOP OF A PRECARIOUS PLATFORM"



Building San Francisco means you'll need the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz, Coit Tower, and lots of perilously stacked humans.

MinecraftMaster

The Most Block-busting Builds!

FROM DIRT TO DINER

Order up! Living the American Dream in Minecraft

C

an you make a '50s-style burger bar in Minecraft? With mods like Pam's Harvestcraft, it's possible - as are over 275 mouthwatering new recipes. Join Minecraft Master JennyRated as she sets off in pursuit of happiness (and happiness equals french fries, duh).

HOW TO INSTALL

First, you'll need to make sure your game runs mods. Go to files.minecraftforge.net to download Forge for your PC or Mac. Start the installer, check that 'Install client' is ticked, and install. Grab Pam's HarvestCraft here: <http://bit.ly/gmharvest>. Drag the downloaded file into the 'Mods' folder of your game's 'Minecraft' folder, and voila! Now you're cooking with gas.



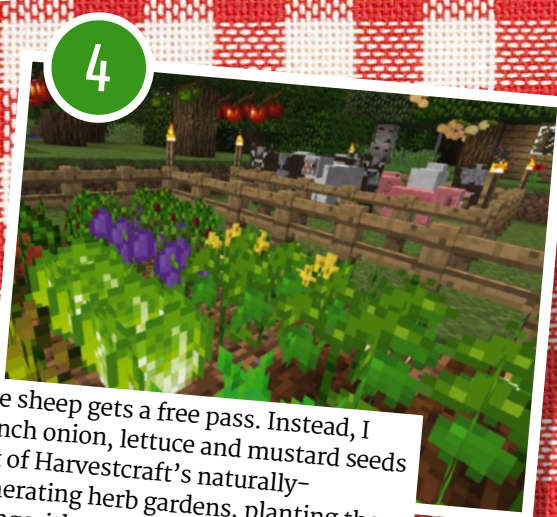
Priorities in Minecraft survival mode: number one, a breathtaking view. Number two, er, probably not dying or something. After a voyage worthy of Columbus himself, I find an idyllic bay.



Wait, the sun's setting already?! Hastily, I dig a makeshift dirt bunker to hide from the night's nasties. How undignified.



My hunger bar's wobbling ominously: let's see what natural bounties Pam's Harvestcraft has in store. Oooh - a cherry tree! But Mister Mutton's looking mighty tasty, too. Which to choose...



The sheep gets a free pass. Instead, I punch onion, lettuce and mustard seeds out of Harvestcraft's naturally-generating herb gardens, planting them along with a few fruit saplings.



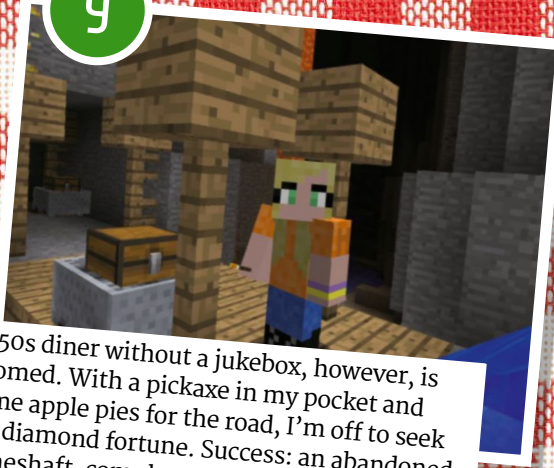
A witch? Just my luck: I'm trying to get my Harvest Moon on, and this joker's trying to get their Harvest Organs on. In fairness, setting up shop next to this ominous cavern was asking for it. Using a stack of dirt, I turf over my new neighbour like they never existed.

6



Me, a big stone sword, and a worried-looking cow. It's not what it looks like. Oh wait, no – it's exactly what it looks like.

9



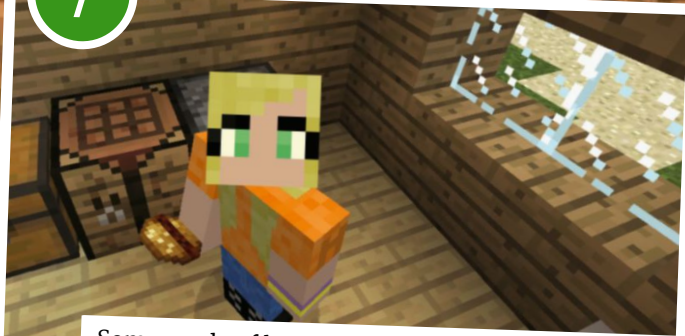
A '50s diner without a jukebox, however, is doomed. With a pickaxe in my pocket and some apple pies for the road, I'm off to seek my diamond fortune. Success: an abandoned mineshaft, complete with loot chests.

11



Roasting my coffee bean crop produces a cracking cup o' joe, and combining eggs, milk and flour creates stacks of pancakes. I expect they'll sell like hot cakes. *Ba-dum-tiss.*

7



Some raw beef here, some furnace-toasted bread there, and... hold on. Have I just crafted a *hamburger*? Disbelievably, I stare down at this gift from the holy goddess Pam – then shove it straight in my cake-burger-hole to restore a meaty seven hunger points.

8



A brilliant business idea forms in my burger-addled brain. A retro, American-style diner is the perfect showcase for my newfound culinary skills. Time to extend the house.

10



One diamond later, I've my very own music-playing machine. A checkerboard floor is a doddle with some dyed wool. The glass ceiling lets in light and boasts a lovely view of spiders' bums at night – I'll just have to be careful I don't break through it.

12

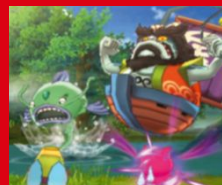


Time to start hiring extra staff, and I've found just the chap. This little green dude is practically exploding with enthusiasm. Er, creeper? You're not *actually* exploding, are y– Aw, nuts. Guess I just got served...

GM Reviews

The Final Verdict!

68 Yo-kai Watch



Balls aren't the cool place to store your monsters anymore - it's all about watches now.

HOW WE SCORE

0-39 Awful Avoid it as you would a bullet with your name on.
40-59 Poor Major issues here that won't be solved with a hug.
60-69 Decent A mixed bag filled with sweets and sharp stones.
70-79 Good Some flaws, but still a very enjoyable experience.
80-89 Excellent Buy it, love it, thank us when you're done.
90-100 Outstanding A rare and essential piece of brilliance.

The small print: We rate games in comparison to what else is available on the same system, in the same genre, and for the same format at the time of release. So this year's FIFA might score less than a FIFA from three years ago, but still be a better game. Because time, and our expectations, move on. Hey, you're smart, you get it...



Not awarded based simply on score, but rather given to games that possess a special blend of qualities. For instant classics that you won't regret owning.

Format PS4 Publisher Sony Developer Naughty Dog ETA Out now Players 1-10

UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

The brothers Drake pick the pirate's life in PS4's most epic adventure

Nathan Drake is a retired treasure hunter. By day he scuba dives for a haulage company, plundering industrial junk instead of pirate gold. By night he turns over legendary artefacts in his attic, and fires toy guns at hanging targets to

substitute the thrill of adventure. He eats stir fry in front of the PlayStation with his wife Elena, who pokes him with a fork when she catches him drifting off to Shambhala in daydreams. He's moved on, done, domesticated. Until, that is, his long-lost brother arrives and proposes a daring mission that dusts off their ageing adrenaline glands.

So where's he been for numerous escapades across consoles and comics since 2007? Well, 15 years ago something happened between the pair that Nate's been feeling pretty guilty about, and rather than mention the older sibling that taught him how to escape the nunnery he was confined to as a child by climbing over the rooftops, the brother who showed him how to sneak into stately homes and extract valuables, Nate instead suppressed all memory.

It's a convenient explanation, sure, but Sam slots effortlessly into the Uncharted universe like he's been there all along. His (Troy Baker) and Nate's (Nolan North) chemistry gives A Thief's End some of its brightest moments. "Did you take any pictures?" asks Sam of his younger brother's prior exploits. "No, but I drew

sketches," says Nate. "What are you going to do with them, put 'em on your fridge?" teases Sam. When the two meet for a heist with returning mentor Sully, a cigar-chomping mixture of Clark Gable and Burt Reynolds, it's the game at its playful best, tasking you with scaling the coastal cliffs of a luxurious villa as a pastel-coloured European town sparkles in the distance, then changing into tuxedos and mingling amongst Crudités-eating one-per-cent-ers, before strong-arming your way out, as so often happens to Drake.

Panama capers

Good vibrations are threatened later by Nate's former partner-in-crime, now

actual partner, Elena, who is reduced to a disapproving nag that hangs over parts of the game like a black cloud at a wedding. Thankfully it doesn't stay like this for too long. In terms of tone, the second half doesn't quite hit the carefree highs of the first, which spans stormy glens, sunny archipelagos, and more locations too good to spoil, but

this is still a consistently brilliant 12 hours.

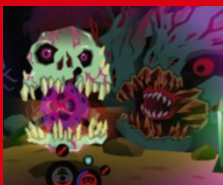
It's no spoiler to say that every single scene is staggering, and worthy of spending hours snapping from every conceivable angle in camera mode (triggered by pressing L3 and R3). It's more than an artistic addition used to pan and zoom and focus; it's a tool that stops time to reveal Naughty Dog's craftsmanship, from the natural sunlight captured without cheesy lens flare, and the low-hanging clouds that cast shadows on the ground in slow-moving patches, and the seemingly infinite draw distance incorporating at points lavender-strewn



"SAM SLOTS EFFORTLESSLY INTO THE UNCHARTED UNIVERSE LIKE HE'S BEEN THERE ALL ALONG"

Do cheats return? Yes! Collect treasure to unlock helium voices, rainbow filters, and alternate costumes (like Scuba Drake).

70 Severed



The minds behind Guacamelee return with something a little more... dismember-y.

72 Fire Emblem Fates



War. Loss. Death. And dating! The latest entry in Nintendo's epic strategy series delivers in spades.

77 Ratchet & Clank



Hot off their movie debut, Sony's dynamic duo is back for a new adventure. Or is it an old one?



SCOTTISH WIDOWS

A gripping early encounter in the Highlands



We took this shot ourselves using the class in-built camera. With filters, optical zoom, and depth-of-field effects, it's like having your own pro-tier SLR.

Press Square for stealth kills – behind cover you'll grab goons and smash their heads into walls, and in long grass you'll trip them for a choke.

The ability to tag enemies makes stealth fairer. A default white arrow glows yellow then orange to indicate increasing levels of suspicion.

The rope fixes onto set points to swing you across gaps, rappel you up and down, and enable diving punches on unsuspecting mercs.

DETAIL ORIENTATED

There are loads of cool little touches, from visual flourishes on an almost micro level to rare events demanding keen eyes and patience. Here are three of our favourites.



Aim flashlight beams at buddies' faces and watch them squint and recoil.



Bullets actually rip apart sandbags and cause the contents to leak from the holes.



Look out to sea on the Scotland stage for a whale breaching the choppy waters.

moors and tropical gullies, to the subtle touches, like flecks of white in Nate's facial fuzz, or the way his grappling hook naturally wraps around objects rather than clipping through them.

Previous Uncharteds attracted criticism for leaning too far into cinematic territory. Linear levels were slight and player agency diminished. That's been improved here in two ways. The first is on a purely visual level: quite simply, you can't see the joins on this film set. There are no jagged edges or flickering shadows or background objects fading into existence, the Hollywood blockbuster visuals serving to convince you the places you're standing in have been around before you and they'll be around after you. For the first time you feel like an explorer.

Secondly, while set-pieces reach a series high – one involves a breathless

“NAUGHTY DOG BLENDS THE CINEMATIC AND THE INTERACTIVE SEAMLESSLY”

car chase starting from the end of a rope dragging behind a mud-slick truck, and plenty more feature across rapidly crumbling architecture – A Thief's End is just as spectacular outside of them. To say Naughty Dog brings together the cinematic and the interactive doesn't quite do its job justice. It blends them seamlessly. There are no gamey healthbars or fade-to-black transitions between playable scenarios, and when the guiding hand does come in, like during an underwater escape as remnants from above cascade in bubbles around you, the camera merely centres

in the right direction to suggest the route rather than wrestling control. Improved visuals and a greater sensation of influence as the player make this feel less restricted than past Uncharted games while retaining filmic sensibilities.

Grappling crook

There's more breathing room, too. One chapter sees you and Sam boat around the aqua-blue waters of an untouched archipelago and dropping anchor wherever you like. Spying a mast poking out of a coral reef in the distance, you can steer over and hop out, diving down

through schools of dazzling fish to examine the centuries-old sunken wreck. Jewels you find and dialogue you discover aren't crucial to the story, but the choice of whether or not to pursue them is important. Plus Drake looks funny when he holds his breath.

These quiet bits are quite brave, too. The game sells itself on explosions and gunfights, yet you actually spend more time scaling Madagascan chapels and spelunking in forgotten caves to a soundtrack of echoes, birdsong, and the occasional quip. Only Naughty Dog could make the act of finding a wooden bucket, lugging it to a pool, filling it up, then passing it up to your brother satisfying. It's because it feels real: Drake's grunts of effort as he bends down, the sloshing of the water in the container, the “thanks, got it” as Sam takes the handle. Sections without incident allow the game's chest to



Fight the power

Drake can shoot in conjunction with almost any manoeuvre: sprinting, rolling, freefalling, vaulting over cover. At one point while swinging on a rope we blind-fire a sniper rifle and miraculously tag a merc in the face. Fisticuffs are also more hectic (if still a little simple), with Square punching and Triangle used to escape headlocks.

Climbing change

The best addition is a grappling hook that attaches to points on the environment and swings you at face-rippling speed over aching chasms. A few hours in you nab a piton which you drive into craggy patches of rock so you can cross wider gaps. Sections in which you slide down steep inclines, however, are a little overused by the end.

Drive club

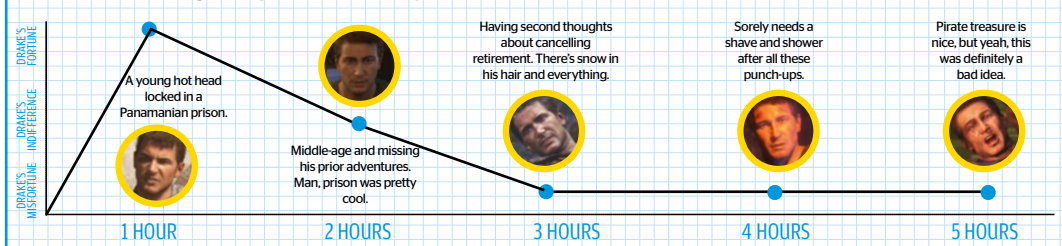
Presumably fed up with being chased, Nathan hops behind the wheel for both straight-ahead scrambles and go-anywhere expeditions. In Madagascar there are several optional areas containing treasure and eliciting extra dialogue from Sully and Sam. The fact you can easily miss them makes their discovery all the more rewarding.

Dialogical choice

A Thief's End is the first Uncharted to feature dialogue choices. Don't expect Bioware levels of story branching, though – it's more a kind of fanservice, letting you reference events from past games. When Sam asks your most memorable adventure, for example, you can prompt Nathan to pick an exploit from one of his three earlier trips.

GAME OF GRAPHS

Drake's escalating escapades as told by his animated face



expand with vital space. Sections with incident, then, are the short, sharp contractions in which all the air is squeezed out – often in a spectacularly violent expulsion.

Combat in Naughty Dog's previous game, *The Last Of Us*, was a tale of desperation and panic as you scampered around in shadows jury-rigging junk to stab people in their most delicate areas. If that was akin to an apology, this is a celebration. A rousing score frames your lemur-like leaping over numerous well-placed environmental footholds, your heroic swinging across ropes, and your Indiana Jones punch-ups.

They often start quietly, all about tracking enemies sneakily from waving long grass, rolling between crates and ammo boxes, and dropping onto enemies from above to snap their necks. With stealth meters and the ability to tag

enemies, completing entire sections this way is finally feasible and earns a "huh, they didn't notice us" from Nate. It's a rare stealth game that makes you want to get noticed, however, and as a testament to Uncharted 4's shooting you'll sometimes blast a poor fool in the face just to feel the kick of the satisfyingly meaty firearms and get the party started.

Drake and dosh

Stages are designed with Drake's climbing skills in mind, often craggy and hilly and filled with wooden overhangs to swing on. It's fun and frantic, more of an "ohhh crap!" to *The Last Of Us*' despairing "damn" as you escape snipers' lasers by running to ravines and dropkicking foes en route, soar off and whip out your grappling hook at the last moment, and flatten the man below. It can feel a little too loose. Drake sliding over to fight

goons several meters away or defying physics by changing his rope's swinging angle on a whim, giving the overall experience the sensation of twirling a gym ribbon: pretty but not entirely your own. What it loses in robustness, though, it gains in fluidity.

You'll clock the pattern early on – quiet, quiet, bang! Quiet, quiet, bang! – but Uncharted 4's brilliance is maintaining that tempo for 12 hours (more if you factor in multiplayer). You'll jet from locale to locale, platforming and fighting and charming across them with a vigour that belies Nate's accumulating paunch and crows feet. Age is a theme here, and obsession, and making a choice in what – or who – to pursue. If it's to be his and Naughty Dog's final outing together, then what a way to go out. And if not, well, it's clear there's plenty of life in the old Drake yet. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ Unbelievably lavish presentation makes the action exhilarating.
- ✓ Jeep-based exploration sections give you room to breathe.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Combat can feel loose, especially when using the rope.
- ✗ Weak villains can't match the protagonists' personality.

Better than...



Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

A Thief's End feels both more awesomely cinematic and less linear than its PS3 predecessor.

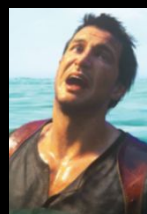
Worse than...



The Last Of Us

The gritty setting of this zombie survival game better suits Naughty Dog's sharp writing and impressive character development.

MULTIPLAYER



Unfortunately the multiplayer servers weren't live at time of writing for this review, so we were unable to evaluate the 60fps team shootouts – watch out for coverage in a future issue.

GM JUDGEMENT

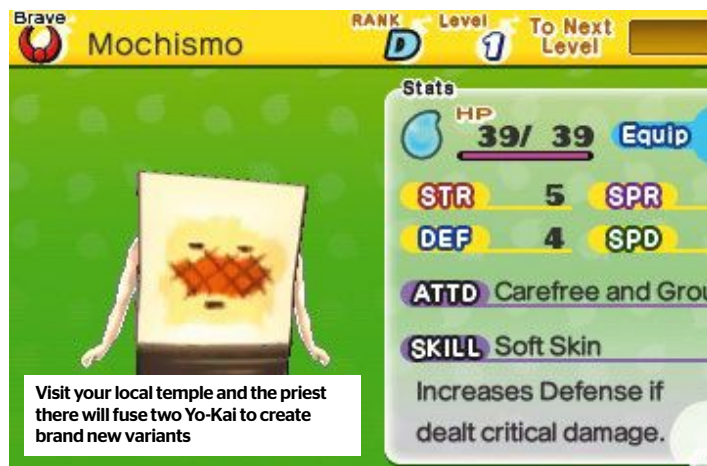
93%



Whiteknuckle action, captivating characters, and luscious locales – the best Uncharted yet.
Ben Griffin

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



Format 3DS Publisher Nintendo Developer Level-5 ETA Out now Players 1

YO-KAI WATCH

Is the latest Japanese sensation a monster hit?

The idea will probably sound a tad familiar. A young boy or girl, around ten years of age, leaves their family home to embark upon a series of light-hearted adventures involving monsters that live within their world. These creatures are recruited and held within portable devices, released only to fight one another, which in turn allows them to level up and eventually evolve as they gain combat experience. Yes, the Pokémon comparisons are obvious - and, despite its creator's protestations, almost certainly actively welcomed - but it's what Yo-Kai Watch does differently from its most overt inspiration that makes it so intriguing.

Firstly, there's no immediate goal to concern yourself with. You've not got any

designs on being the very best, like no one ever was; rather, you play as an average achiever with a knack for getting into mischief. Early on, you stumble upon a mysterious capsule machine, twist the release mechanism and unleash a spirit, Whisper, who acts as your guide to the world of the Yo-Kai. The devs would rather you not call them ghosts or monsters, but in truth they're kind of both, mostly based on beasts from Japanese folk tales.

Some Yo-Kai are friendly, others are not, and many are mischievous sorts, engineering moments of social awkwardness by possessing human subjects and gleefully watching the results play out. The gloomy Dismarelda causes an argument between your in-game parents; later, the grinning Wazzat makes your father forget important documents at the train station. They're characterful, well-designed creations, appealing especially to

younger audiences, and each bears an endearingly punny name. Including, for example, Cuttincheez, a flatulent Yo-Kai with a bum for a face.

Watch this space

The chapter-based structure, meanwhile, is more reminiscent of Level-5's Inazuma Eleven series than Pokémon. Its light-hearted dilemmas keep things ticking over nicely, while dozens of side-quests appear as flags on the bottom screen's maps, creating just enough visual fuss to distract you from the task at hand. You'll probably need to complete a few anyway, to prepare your team of Yo-Kai sufficiently for the bosses that await at a chapter's end.

Outside narrative-crucial quests, you'll encounter Yo-Kai in the wild by searching near points of interest, marked on the top screen by a magnifying glass icon. Should the needle on your watch's radar start to twitch, you know it's time to investigate further. You'll get a close up of a tree, a telephone pole, a shrub, or the underside of a parked car, moving a lens to locate and identify what's causing the supernatural signal. It'll be alerted after a few seconds, and you'll be forced to chase it around the screen for a short time until it fully appears, whereupon it



ONI BY THE NIGHT

The risky rewards of Terror Time

When you're wandering around your hometown at night, a timer will periodically tick down on your watch's display, prompting a phenomenon called Terror Time, where you'll be hunted by a giant red ogre, or oni. You'll only attract its attention by alerting one of its minions, so careful exploration is key, and it's well worth your while to have a wander to locate red chests, which hold some of the rarest items in the game. You'll have to sprint to the exit if you're spotted, as the oni will demolish your entire team - and your loot - in seconds.

"WE BARELY SCRAPED THROUGH A COUPLE OF FIGHTS WITH JUST ONE OR TWO YO-KAI STILL STANDING"



Visually it's more impressive than the 3DS Pokémon games – though it does have less to render.



The ghost-like Whisper is your guide and constant companion, following you wherever you go.

will challenge you to a fight, usually calling in two friends for backup.

Battles aren't nearly as complex as the barrage of tutorial text may make them seem at first glance. Nor are they as worryingly straightforward as your early encounters might suggest. It's essentially a plate-spinning act that grows more intuitive the more time you spend with it. You can have up to three Yo-Kai in play at any one time, with three more on your backline, ready to be rotated in via the stylus. They'll attack automatically, steadily filling their Soultimate gauge which invites you to play a brief touchscreen minigame (Tap the orbs! Trace the shapes! Spin this thing around!) to launch a powerful attack, a flurry of blows, or to impart status effects upon allies or opponents. You will, of course, need to maintain their health, lobbing them food and drink to refresh, or tonics to top up their meter. Sometimes they'll be possessed, or 'inspired', at which point they're much more likely to target friends or slack off: time, then, to temporarily bench them and use the purify command, a kind of magic sponge designed to return them to full fitness.

Yet for most encounters you don't need to worry too much about any of

that. A combination of regular and Soultimate attacks will see off the vast majority of Yo-Kai before they've even come close to forcing one of your own to eat a rice ball, custard bread or dried mackerel to recover. The way to a rival's heart is also through their stomach: tossing them items they enjoy will make them more likely to approach you and ask if they can join your Yo-Kai squad, though it takes some experimentation before you grow attuned to the fussy tastes of some monsters.

Pinpoint accuracy

Otherwise, it's only when you encounter bosses that you'll really need to think tactically. You can throw pins to target individual opponents or specific body parts: a colossal clown's attacks will miss if you whack him hard enough to close his eyes, opening up the weak spot on his forehead. Floating orbs, meanwhile, require a careful aim to release their contents, which can help you refuel at vital moments. These fights might cause the difficulty to spike, but it's fun to figure out their weak points without assistance – even if they're rather signposted – and the intensity makes for a pleasant change of rhythm from the otherwise relaxed



SQUAD GOALS

Medaling with powers you can't possibly comprehend

Building a Yo-Kai team that's capable of tackling all the post-game challenges – and, more importantly, helping you complete your Medallium – involves a good deal of patience, a similar amount of trial and error, and a willingness to switch up your squad. Even if that means substituting your favourites. There are several variables to consider, with positioning being key. Each Yo-Kai belongs to one of eight tribes, from Brave to Eerie, Shady to Tough. Putting two or more of the same tribe adjacent to one another in your front three gives them a Unity bonus, which will boost a specific stat: Charming types will move faster, while Slippery Yo-Kai will become harder for enemies to inspire. In doing so, of course, you'll leave yourself unbalanced if you don't rotate them out occasionally. Cadin, one of the earliest Yo-Kai you'll meet, is something of a glass cannon; though his Modest skill means he won't often be directly targeted, he'll still be in trouble when a high-level opponent launches an area attack. Hand him an item to boost his defence, however, and he'll stay in the fight longer. Better still, place a Yo-Kai like Tattletell next to him and her ability to recover the HP of adjacent allies will save you relying upon healing items. Finally, you'll have to take their attitude into account: some high-ranking Yo-Kai are next to useless because they'd rather loaf around in battle.

pace of combat. We don't mind admitting we scraped through a couple of the harder fights with just one or two Yo-Kai still standing, and actually lost all six on more than one occasion.

The story progresses at a brisk pace, lasting around 20 hours for those that simply want to reach the end and watch the credits roll. But there's plenty to tempt you back. Many will want to fill up their Yo-Kai Medallium, which means upgrading your watch to its fullest potential, finally giving you the tools to hunt down the rarest and most powerful Yo-Kai. Alternatively, you can use tokens and Play Coins up to three times a day on the capsule machine, read QR codes, or take photos of your friends and family to find the critters you need to complete your collection.

Beyond that, you might find its appeal wearing off rather quickly. Lacking the long-term stickability of Pokémon's competitive element, Yo-Kai Watch is the kind of RPG you'll obsess about for its duration, but not a great deal longer. Though we suspect its publisher won't mind; it might hope Yo-Kai Watch recreates its Japanese success, but it would probably prefer one of its star properties not to be outshone. ■

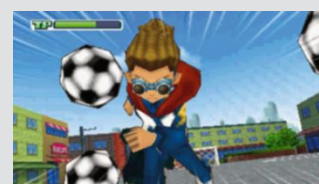
GM LOVES...

- ✓ Terrific localisation gives the writing universal appeal.
- ✓ Boss fights are tense and thrilling affairs.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Regular scraps are too simplistic, even if it does quicken the grind.
- ✗ Lacks the longevity and subtlety of Pokémon.

Better than...



Inazuma Eleven

Yo-Kai Watch might take some of its design cues from this football RPG, but it's a much more polished and well-rounded adventure.

Worse than...



Pokémon X/Y

Level-5's game might have the edge when it comes to visuals – by quite some way – but this is definitely still the monster-battler to beat.

i NEED TO KNOW



The third game in the series is due out in Japan this summer. As with Yo-Kai Watch 2, it comes in two tasty varieties: Tempura and Sushi, with certain Yo-Kai exclusive to each version.

GM JUDGEMENT

80%



An expertly paced and enjoyable Pokémon-like RPG, tailored beautifully for younger audiences.
Chris Schilling

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



Format PS Vita Publisher Drinkbox Studios Developer Drinkbox Studios ETA Out now Players 1

SEVERED

No 'arm in giving it a go

There's no place worse than home in the opening of Drinkbox's intriguing follow-up to sleeper hit

Guacamelee. As heroine Sasha walks through the crumbling ruins of her former abode, three family members lost, the only thing in her world that doesn't appear to be broken is a mirror, reflecting back at her that she's now one arm lighter than she should be. A towering demon offers her a sword and a chance to make things right. How can she refuse?

Abandon your expectations: Severed's got a knack for defying them. The platforming of spiritual predecessor Guacamelee is out, in favour of old-school first-person RPG movement – you can look freely but only step forward or backward one pace at a time, and the layout of the world echoes dungeon crawlers of the past. Like those retro classics, the world is deeply woven

with detail, but perhaps looks more daunting than it actually is. There are plenty of surprises, still – for attentive explorers who don't mind a bit (ok, a lot) of backtracking, Drinkbox has slipped in plenty of puzzles and secrets.

While the navigation is certainly retro, combat is purely modern, with every swing and slice performed by sliding your fingers across the touchpad. Think Infinity Blade, except there's no dodging or blocking – you're relying on parrying and unlockable magic spells instead – and you're fighting groups rather than single adversaries. There's an addictive flow to the fights as you work out the best way to handle each crowd of monstrous brutes.

Severance hackage

In lieu of XP, you earn upgrades by hacking off parts of the beasts you slay – you even wear chunks of the bosses you dismember. This unique approach grounds the RPG elements within the darker aspects of the story, and levelling up feels more resonant as a result.

If you're not into working out your finger, Severed isn't going to sink its hooks into you. While it boasts a well-thought out system that offers up tense and rewarding battles, fights sometimes feel maddening for the wrong reasons. There's the comfort issue of having to cradle the Vita with one hand while swiping with the other, and missing out on a vital upgrade because your strike isn't quite right can be infuriating. This vexation is honed to a blade-edged rage whenever you're tasked with a fight against the clock. The result is battles that swing between finesse and inelegance depending on circumstances – an unfortunate level of inconsistency, given that combat is Severed's core pillar.

But it's brilliant to watch Drinkbox cultivate its unique style here. The game bears a visual resemblance to Guacamelee, but forgoes that cartoony feel for something more mature. A pervasive sense of dread is conveyed beautifully by the foreboding landscapes and character designs, each enhanced by the Vita's size-appropriate screen, and a less-is-more approach to the story ensures filling in the blanks a joy. As you push on further there's much to discover about the world and its inhabitants, with a complete picture always tantalisingly out-of-reach and open to interpretation. Deft touches such as these help Severed become more than the sum of its parts. ■

“EVERY SWING AND SLICE IS PERFORMED BY SLIDING YOUR FINGERS ACROSS THE TOUCHPAD”

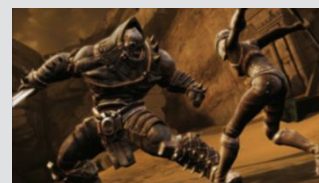
GM LOVES...

- ✓ The gorgeous visuals look crisp on the Vita's screen.
- ✓ Combat has an addictive rhythm when you find a flow...

GM HATES...

- ✗ ...but equally it can feel frustrating and overwhelming.
- ✗ At ten hours to clear out everything, it's a little short.

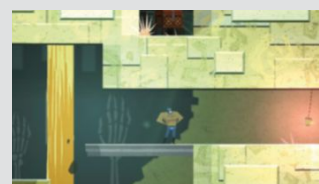
Better than...



Infinity Blade

Just as satisfying as to play, with similar touch-based fights, but its world isn't as striking or involving as Severed's dark, surreal landscape.

Worse than...



Guacamelee

It's an excruciatingly tough decision, but Guacamelee's consistent combat and 2D platforming flair ensures it just about bests its successor.

NEED TO KNOW



Severed is currently exclusive to the Vita, but there may be hope for other platforms. On the game's site, an FAQ leaves a vague "No comment" under questions about mobile and PC ports.

GM JUDGEMENT

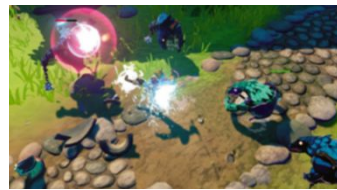
81%



The touchscreen combat is hit and miss, but the world is thick with irresistible atmosphere.
Ben Tyrer



It's unclear why ravens are working for a toad – or why they're portrayed as dim-witted when in real life they're very clever.



Format PS4 (reviewed), PC Publisher Spearhead Games Developer Spearhead Games ETA Out now Players 1

STORIES: THE PATH OF DESTINIES

A novel narrative, but the combat's by the book

Once upon a time, there was a fantastic action-RPG with an amazing soundtrack, absorbing combat, and beautiful art. It was called *Bastion*, and all throughout the land, people agreed it was great. Years later, along came this game. It coveted *Bastion*'s success and did its best to mimic its systems and style, from the dynamic narration to the perilous skybound environments. Familiarities aside, it did have the good sense to throw in a new trick or two. It was a valiant effort, with some things to admire. Alas, not every tale can end happily ever after.

Stories is frustrating because it's almost something interesting. It's a top-down action-RPG with a neat twist: you're experiencing the future as told through a magical book. In a world of anthropomorphic animals, you play as Reynardo, a roguish fox gifted in the art of swordplay. His job, reluctantly

accepted, is to bring down the evil empire of a power-hungry toad.

Before each level, you're given a choice between two or more paths. At the end of the fifth, final level, you learn of Reynardo's fate based on your decisions. This isn't a long game, but it is a wide one. At the end of each playthrough, you're taken back to the start and given the opportunity to try something different. It's like *Groundhog Day*, only instead of Bill Murray there's a swashbuckling fox.

Fox tale

Finish a story, and you may learn a 'truth' – a discovery about a character or object that can inform future decisions. There are four to find, and unlocking them all is the key to getting the best ending. That means, if you want to see *Stories*' official resolution, you need to complete it a minimum of five times. That wouldn't be so bad – like we say, it's short – but there are only a handful of levels, some of which appear in every playthrough.

Repetition is unavoidable, and quickly grates. It's nice to see how the plot can

diverge, but the game itself simply isn't as varied. That feeds through to the combat, too. The collective noun for ravens is 'an unkindness', and that feels appropriate given how many you'll kill. Some carry a shield, while others explode when hit. But there's not enough different types to make combat feel varied or challenging – especially because it's so simple.

Your basic options are to attack or counter. As you earn XP, you can unlock new skills – including a dash, a hookshot, and combo-based special abilities. But even at high level, *Stories* lacks finesse. Your sword feels slow, and the counter sluggish. There's some satisfaction to clearing a room without taking a hit, but that's not enough to sustain an action-RPG across a full campaign.

Between fights you're encouraged to scour the levels for chests containing crafting materials. These upgrade your various swords, which each have a special power. Once again, the repetitious structure is a disadvantage. We'd fully upgraded our arsenal by the fourth of six playthroughs, thus negating the need for further exploration.

To be clear, *Stories* isn't a bad game. It's a passable afternoon with some middling combat. True to its name, its story conceit is the one truly interesting feature. Unfortunately, the game isn't as varied as its narrative. ■

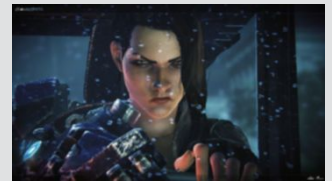
GM LOVES...

- ✓ There's an impressive variety to all the different endings.
- ✓ Building combos is satisfying, even if the combat is a bit weak.

GM HATES...

- ✗ The enemies and environments quickly grow repetitive.
- ✗ The narrator sounds like he's on loan from a CBBC kid's show.

Better than...



Bombshell

Stories has some problems, but it's not a terrible, buggy mess with weak combat and dialogue that could make Duke Nukem cringe. *Bombshell* is.

Worse than...



Bastion

Everything about *Bastion*'s presentation is exceptional, from its looks to its music, and there's far more depth and variety to its combat.

2ND OPINION



"The core concept is excellent, and on your first couple of playthroughs the possibilities seem endless. It quickly becomes clear, though, that the developer's ambition outstrips its ability. There is a lot to like here, but it's tainted throughout by what feels like wasted potential."
Robin Valentine, Production Editor

GM JUDGEMENT

62%



A story more innovative than the repetitive and often shallow game it's attached to.
Phil Savage

"IT'S LIKE GROUNDHOG DAY, ONLY INSTEAD OF BILL MURRAY THERE'S A SWASHBUCKLING FOX"

Format 3DS **Publisher** Nintendo
Developer Intelligent Systems **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

FIRE EMBLEM FATES

Once, twice, three times a scorching tactical adventure



he folk at Intelligent Systems had a problem on their hands after the launch of *Fire Emblem Awakening* back in 2013. While it was rightly lauded for its engrossing characters and impressive depth, it also caused some of the more

hardcore fanbase a bit of grief. Those weaned on the tough-as-leather original franchise entries suddenly found themselves devoting as much time to woo-ing would be suitors and match-making their followers as commanding the battlefield. With *Fates*, the studio is taking a stab at keeping both camps happy.

To this end *Fates* comes in three distinct flavours. There's *Bright*, a much easier, breezier affair that sees you play on the side of the 'goodies'. Here is where those more interested in following a story, in progression, and in tactical experimentation can get involved in the most accessible manner possible. Over in *Conquest*, meanwhile, you join forces with the 'baddies' and take part in a much, *much* harder campaign as a result. Meanwhile, for completionists and those keen to pick every last bit of the story clean, comes additional DLC story path *Revelations*, a middle ground of difficulty and progression wherein you don't pick any side and attempt to carve out your own neutral path through the warring nations plot.

Whichever version you end up playing through, you always follow the story of Corrin, your princely (or

princess-ly) avatar who at a young age was kidnapped from their biological parents and whisked away to be raised amongst an enemy nation's royal retinue. As Corrin, you adventure through a series of battles spread over individual chapters, each one bookended by cutscenes loaded with political bickering and personal drama.

Nohr-ty devils

The epic set up involves two nations: the eastern-flavoured Hoshido, your birth nation, and the plate armour-wearing Nohr, the naughty invaders who pinched you away to raise you under their flag. Each nation is peopled by its own cast of followers, whom you meet and ally with as you progress, and much of what makes

these two stories distinct is delivered via the characters each one lets you pal around with as you adventure.

There's a gloriously unique rub to this game-wide divide: the friends you make through a playthrough in one game will be your sworn enemies, destined to die by your sword, in another. If you're planning to play through all three games (and a cheeky glance over at the score

will alert you that this is no bad idea), then know that by partway through playthrough two you'll be aching right in the chest cavity vicinity.

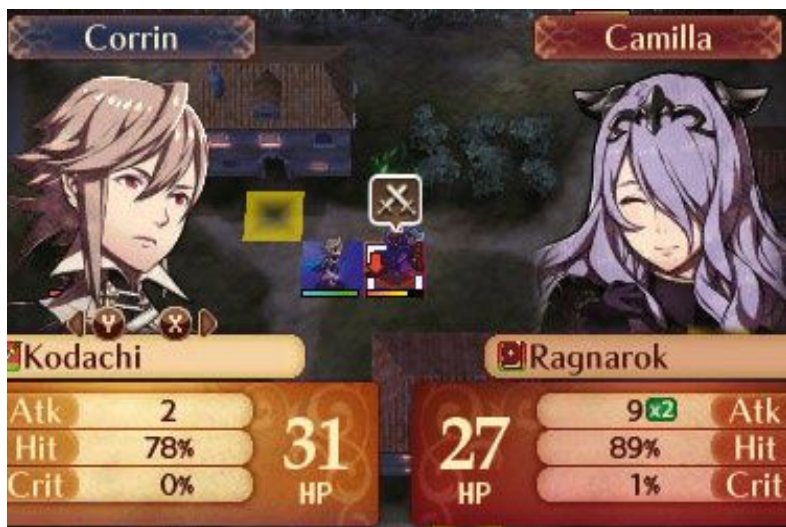
Case in point: in our first playthrough (*Bright*) our Corrin fell in love and ended up marrying spear-wielding tough girl Oboro. Through between-level dialogue and in-battle support Corrin and Oboro became both an unstoppable force within our party and a source of charmingly awkward natter as they grew closer. Over on playthrough two, we found ourselves at the mercy end of her naginata, with no choice but to raise our blade and take her down.



"THE FRIENDS YOU MAKE IN ONE PLAYTHROUGH WILL BE YOUR SWORN ENEMIES IN ANOTHER"

What was the hardest part of writing this review? No slamming down the hard reset buttons with each character death in *Classic* mode.





SERIES GUIDE

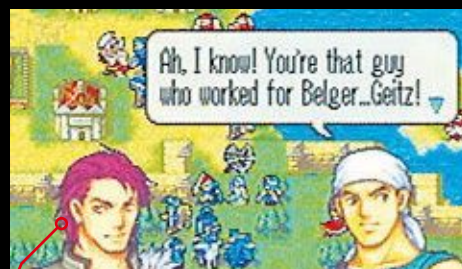
Learn how the flames of Fire Emblem took hold...



Awakening introduced elements such as the 3D camera system and character models, as well as a collection of incredibly lush cutscenes to add some flash to the story.



While we're all about the lush new looks on 3DS, there's something special about the older pixel sprites.



The graphics have evolved since the first western release, but the story holds up surprisingly well.



FIRE EMBLEM (2004)

While it was the first to come west, this was actually the seventh game in the series in Japan. The popularity of characters such as Marth and Roy in Smash Bros Melee convinced Nintendo we might like the series over here.



FIRE EMBLEM: THE SACRED STONES (2005)

The one where Intelligent Systems might not have innovated to a great degree, but doubled down on telling a supremely affecting story with painstakingly fleshed-out characters.



FIRE EMBLEM: RADIANT DAWN (2008)

This Wii number was perhaps the straw that broke the camel's back, heavily criticised for its overly punishing level of difficulty, which saw the team return to the drawing board for the next entry.



FIRE EMBLEM AWAKENING (2013)

The game that brought the series to the masses, retaining that tight tactical core, but also introducing much of the dating sim-esque character interaction we can see in abundance in all three versions of Fire Emblem Fates.

While there are plot holes a-plenty, Fire Emblem Fates' split narrative structure feeds brilliantly into a powerful over-arching theme. How many games about war make you see humanity on both sides of a conflict? How many evoke tangible emotions tied to individual characters involved in said conflicts? The answer is three, and they all start with Fire Emblem Fates.

Vein train

In terms of the nitty gritty game juice behind all this rumpy pump and political/personal grandstanding, there are three shiny new features on top of the tried, tested, and bulletproof turn-based Awakening formula. The first is Dragon Veins, particular tiles on each map which trigger special events should you manage to get a member of your royal crew to stand upon it. Initially an easily ignorable quirk, allowing you to, say, summon a rock fall to do damage or to sink mountains into the earth to allow

"OUR RECOMMENDED MODE, CLASSIC, MEANS WHEN A CHARACTER DIES, THEY'RE GONE FOR GOOD"

for easy passage through rocky valleys, these quickly become a steadfast part of your tactical planning. This is especially true in the Conquest campaign, where clever use of Veins can give you the advantage when the odds are otherwise impossibly stacked against you.

There's also My Castle, which gives you some much needed breathing room between battles. After each clash you're sent back to your demesne, where you can build new features such as stat-boosting statues, gladiatorial arenas or, uh, a sauna to, *cough*, unwind in. More than an extra set of toys to tinker with, however, My Castle ends up being both a neat multiplayer aside, where you can invade other players' Castles and must

defend yours, and most importantly, a great place to unwind and chat with your personable party members.

There's a telling absence, though. In the original Japanese version a questionable mini-game saw you - and there's no non-awkward way to put this - *stroke* the faces of your followers in order to boost your friendship rating with them. Surely an HR situation just waiting to happen in any other circumstance. The feature was removed from this western release, presumably as it was so cringe worthy to play. The thing is, it's kept in the function to invite party members back to your room, where instead of some stylus-based petting you're tasked with observing your

follower's blushing visage up close for a few seconds while they compliment you. Perhaps it was kept in to ensure the balance of stats remains consistent, but blimey it's uncomfortable, and it feels like a half-baked feature.

The third new addition - and this might be the least celebrated yet most important for series aficionados - is the inclusion of a bevy of difficulty modes. There are three levels of trickiness, each of which can be tweaked a further three times with a varying harshness of permadeath. Casual, for example, sees followers respawn on the next turn, while our recommended mode, Classic, makes it so that once a character snuffs it they're gone for good. (That said, even the hardest of players will struggle on Classic in the Conquest campaign. It really is *that* tough.)

Fire Emblem Fates has a couple of other minor problems, mainly with how it crowbars in game structure with little of the narrative finesse that graced its

FAMILY FORT-UNES

Our favourite brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers in arms



1 Everyone loves an underdog, and series veterans will know that the most unassuming character can become indispensable with time. Mozu is just such, going from timid Villager to Master At Arms, a stronger form of the Samurai class.



2 The best thing about Hoshido posh 'un Subaki is that he thinks he's perfect. And he's almost right, given that he's an especially strong unit for any party to have. But team him up with humble Mozu for some fun diversions to bring him back down to earth.



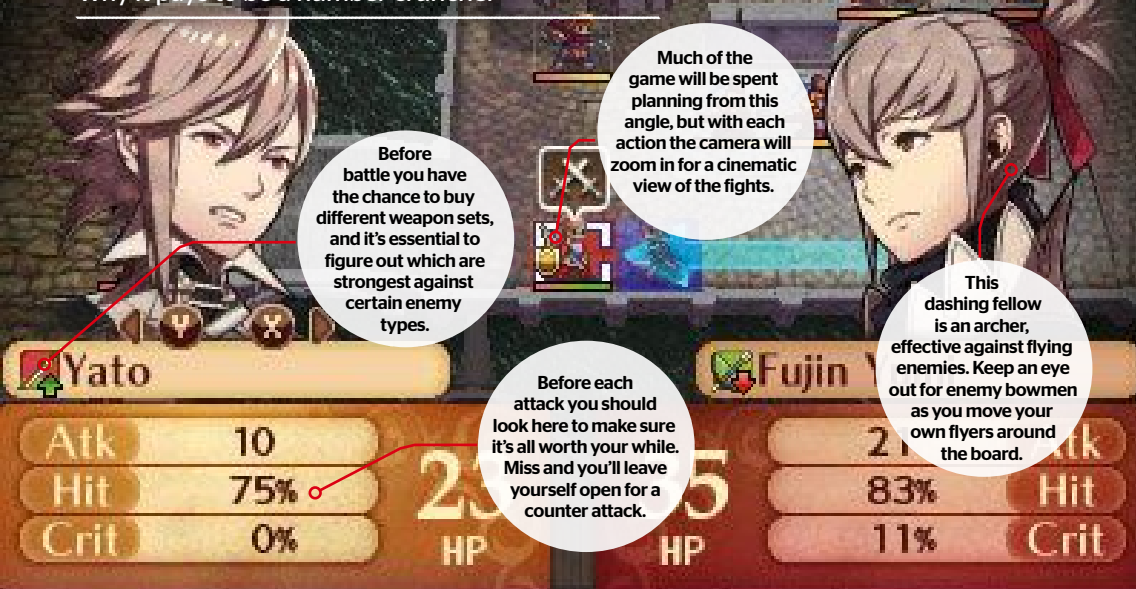
3 Square-jawed Arthur is a good guy surrounded on all sides by evil types, so naturally makes for some great comic relief as you hack your way through Nohr's Conquest campaign. Suffers from chronic bad luck, too, which is fun when he tries to - ahem - woo the ladies.



4 Depending on whether your main character is male or female, you'll get either Jakob the butler or Felicia the maid as a follower from the start. Both are steadfast healers with some neat damage potential. Worry not though as eventually you'll get both.

ANALYSE THIS

Why it pays to be a number cruncher



immediate predecessor. You can marry and have kids, but the fact that they grow old instantly to join your party as a co-combatant is explained away with a back-breakingly inexplicable plot black hole. Also, there are a couple of instances of characters dying outside of combat. Now, these moments would be fine if they were played to particularly

dramatic effect (think Aeris in FFVII levels), but they aren't. Instead you're just told that you're favourite mainstay is now dead and the game marches on without them. Only afterwards, scouring online forums and the like, might you realise that there was a hidden set of requirements to meet to keep them alive. Considering how big a part a

character's death plays in shaping your game on a moment-to-moment basis, that Fates takes it out of your hands feels unfair, cheap, and pointlessly cruel.

Friend zones

These moments are thankfully few, and given how vast these three games are when put together, easily forgiven. We called Fates 'epic' earlier. It's a term that's overused, but we mean it in every sense of the word. There are so many characters to meet, stories to experience, battles to fight, relationships to foster, rivals to vanquish, fallen friends to avenge, and challenges to overcome, it couldn't be *more* epic. Wherever you choose to begin your story in Fates, at the relative ease of Birthright or the nail-biting Conquest (we recommend you save Revelations for once those two have been finished to avoid major spoilers) know that you're about to engage in Nintendo's most capable, ambitious and engrossing story yet. ■



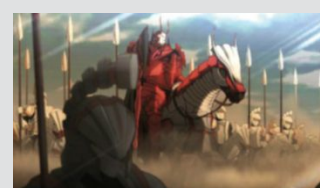
GM LOVES...

- ✓ The story is vast and the characters are a joy to discover.
- ✓ New features such as Dragon Veins add tactical depth.
- ✓ Both the most accessible and most challenging FE yet.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Plot holes and awkward dialogue abound.

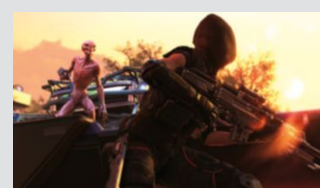
Better than...



Fire Emblem Awakening

Though Awakening's story is pleasingly concise, Fates is almost incomparably broader, and packed with much more varied characters.

Worse than...



XCOM 2

While not nearly as sprawling as Fire Emblem Fates, this tactical PC exclusive's guerilla warfare campaign is a far more focused experience.

DLC



There's a whole bunch of downloadable packs inbound post-release, including extra maps, an adventure with series mainstay Anna and a 'secret' prologue.

GM JUDGEMENT

92%

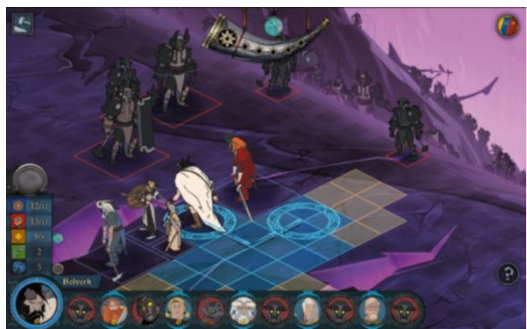
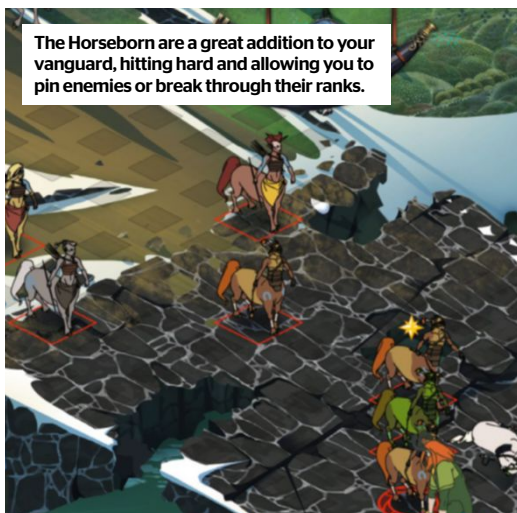


A unique twist on the formula which pays off. A staggering achievement.

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



Format PC Publisher Versus Evil Developer Stoic ETA Out now Players 1

THE BANNER SAGA 2

Raising the standard for Stoic's Norse strategy tale

This turn-based strategy series has always been planned as a bleak, gruelling experience – Stoic has set out to weave a tale of hardship and brutally difficult decisions. But while the original did stark consequence in a way few games would dare, with so much lore to establish and a repetitive army of stone men called the Dredge hounding you, it could also, at times, feel like chipping away at a brick wall.

This follow-up is less a sequel, more a direct continuation – it feels like it's missing a 'Chapter' in that title – and yet a bevy of smart refinements have allowed more light in to contrast with all the portentous shade. Broadly speaking, much is unchanged: you still guide caravans of clansmen across hand-painted landscapes, making tough choices along the way. And when those choices lead to violence, you still fight via

a turn-based combat system where health is also strength, meaning you must balance breaking armour now to expose soft targets later, and putting less hurt on with each hit, but diminishing the power of reprisals.

Viking of the hill

Yet while neither component is radically different, each is enlivened by the brisker pace and greater variety. Combat is the biggest beneficiary. Not only will you butt horns with the likes of Horseborn (centaurs who favour hit-and-run strikes), Kragmen (who bring war bears to the party), and human warbands, but battles now often feature objectives that ask much more of you than simply to have the last unit standing. And while this combat system has always emphasised positioning – with its four-square-wide horned giants and inability to pass through other units – that's amplified by battlefields that now bring with them barricades or impassable cracks, forcing you to consider your starting deployment and turn order carefully.

The story, meanwhile, benefits from establishing very little, instead trusting to a decent but short recap video to remind returning players where the last game left off and catch newcomers up. It means this is not the ideal entry point into a series with a large ensemble cast and reams of rich lore, though there's just enough to go on if you do jump in here. On the flip side, it allows TBS2 to devote its entire runtime to furthering its mythic drama of dead gods and encroaching darkness, and to tap deep into the repercussions of a practical people eking out a living in a world shaped by cosmic forces beyond their control. The series' art style has always been sumptuous, but here there is also the glorious sense of imaginations being unbounded, despite the tone being as grim as ever.

These adjustments rekindle a lot of enthusiasm for the series, though some persistent flaws do remain. The UI is cluttered and inert, for example, which can make getting a good overview of the battlefield hard. Hero deaths through text events can still frustrate. And the ending is again a low ebb in an otherwise powerful journey, due to a need to dangle threads for the third instalment. Still, for all its minor imperfections, TBS2 resoundingly proves that despite the shaky start of its first entry, this is a saga worth seeing through. ■

“BATTLES FEATURE OBJECTIVES THAT ASK MORE OF YOU THAN HAVING THE LAST UNIT STANDING”

GM LOVES...

- ✓ Fresh variety allows the combat to fulfil its potential.
- ✓ Stoic takes the story to exciting new places.

GM HATES...

- ✗ UI clutter and a single viewpoint can prevent clarity in combat.
- ✗ The abrupt ending left us disappointed and unsatisfied.

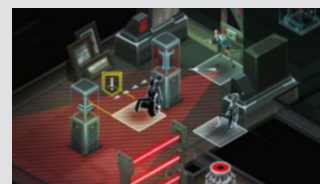
Better than...



Code Name STEAM

Pulpy literary heroes. Steam-powered armour. Lovecraftian overtones. It should be impossible to make this mix boring, but this 3DS squib managed.

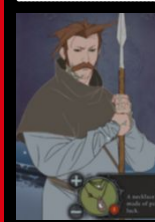
Worse than...



Invisible, Inc

Klei's cyber-noir game blends sneaking, hacking, and strategy across a taut, malleable campaign. Just as atmospheric, but even more nuanced.

I NEED TO KNOW



The first game was a Kickstarter success, and overfunding allowed Stoic to hire an orchestra to play Journey composer Austin Wintory's epic soundtrack. He returns for TBS2 – his first ever sequel.

GM JUDGEMENT

78%



More varied, fluid, and emotive than the first, TBS2 is a strong middle chapter full of engaging strategy.
Matt Clapham



Unlike his Lombax friend, Clank isn't much to write home about in a scrap, so his challenges revolve more around brain-teasers than brawls.

Format PS4 Publisher Sony Developer Insomniac Games ETA Out now Players 1

RATCHET & CLANK

Subtitle: we've finally run out of rude puns

Calling this an HD remaster of the 2002 classic would be like saying you're a remaster of yourself from 14 years ago. There are structural similarities sure, but fancy new flesh hangs off bigger bones, voices have changed, and there are more hair effects. Over this action-platformer remake's eight hours, a primer for the movie that explores the duo's origin, you'll find yourself replacing old memories with better ones.

Memories like navigating a monorail tearing through a futuristic city. You leap between carriages lobbing fusion grenades to send choppers spinning in spirals of smoke and flames, hang precariously off the side as hover cars scream past, and dodge the outstretched limbs of curious cargo reaching through bars. Wait, was that in the original? Doesn't matter – your brain is updated. Later you'll compete in hoverboard championships, grind rails over lava lakes, dogfight in your barrel-rolling ship, and pilot a jetpack

through toxic atmospheres. It plays like a fresh experience humming with déjà vu.

There are nine worlds and they're all gorgeous, from the orange nebula enveloping asteroid station G34, or swarms of laser-trading ships battling over the aptly named Batalia. Ratchet's dream of joining Captain Qwark's Galactic Rangers sends him from planet to planet assisting the locals: on Arida you have to save pizza-munching hoverboarder Skidd McMarx from a pack of sandsharks, and stakes escalate on Hawaiian-themed Pokitaru whose water supply is being sucked up by hydroharvesters.

Qwark souls

This unfortunately results in an increasingly convoluted story encompassing numerous locations and laden with confusing talk of Blargs and Deplanetisers and Gadgetrons. And it's a shame each planetary excursion doesn't last long. After you've completed an associated mission and nabbed the relevant thruster/hacker/underwater-breather, there's little else to do. Kerwan in particular is a marvel – you almost want to hail a hover taxi and head

downtown for a wander – but it's sorely underused as set dressing.

Like the thickening plot, combat complicates as you uncover exotic weaponry, but it's impressively readable throughout – despite players wielding beams that turn foes into sheep, rifles able to scan weak spots in first-person, and disco balls that make everyone spontaneously boogie (Snagglebeasts breakdance, giant squid do the Egyptian, and military tanks bop their turrets to the beat). Details endear, too. After chomping you, Robomutts spit out tufts of yellow fur, and the new Pixelizer gun turns enemies into retro sprites which, when whacked, collapse into digitised cubes.

Somewhat dampening the fun, these weapons are mostly lifted from past games – Buzz Blades, RYNO, Mr Zurkon, and more repeat. Meanwhile new collectable cards that buff your wrench or boost bolt drops feel shoehorned in – there's already an upgrade system, two is overkill. Gold screws unlock fun cheats and screen filters (turn bolts into Sonic rings, wear a Snagglebeast helmet), but grinding for them is like repeatedly whacking an empty ketchup bottle to get one last drop out. The journey satisfies without these extras.

Unsurprisingly, a game based on a film based on a game is hard to follow. But forget the messy plot and focus on the joyous action across lush worlds and you'll find a 2002 hit reborn anew. ■

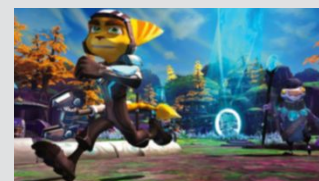
GM LOVES...

- ✓ Soft and sublime visuals are like wearing a warm onesie.
- ✓ The balance of fights, puzzles, and set-pieces is just right.

GM HATES...

- ✗ For what is ostensibly a kid's game, the story is confusing.
- ✗ We wish there was more to do on each of the planets.

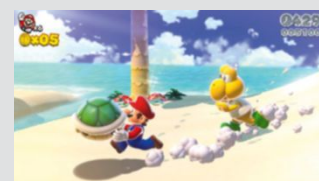
Better than...



Ratchet & Clank: A Crack in Time

Another great R&C game, but it can't match the pace, visual flair, and impressive action of this latest entry.

Worse than...



Super Mario 3D World

Mario's Wii U outing is the premier 3D HD platformer – tighter than Ratchet, even more charming, and with multiplayer to boot.

2ND OPINION



"My fave galactic duo are back – and more unbelievably fun than ever. Pinpoint-precise 3D platforming? Guns that blasts enemies to pixels? Dogfighting in Metropolis? I can hardly process it all. Shame the same goes for the reshuffled plot..."

Jen Simpkins, Staff Writer, OPM

GM JUDGEMENT

79%



The only non-Nintendo 3D platformer to feel fresh in 2016, and the right way to remake.

Ben Griffin

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



Format PS4 Publisher Sony Developer Housemarque ETA Out now Players 1-4

ALIENATION

Celebrate Independence Slay with a little rock and reroll

This top-down shooter-cum-RPG sees you playing as one of three UNX soldier types tasked with heading into classified zones such as Alaska, Brazil, and Pripyat, to eradicate the alien menace. Your choice of ability (each class has three actives and three passives) determines tactics: brutish Tanks have access to shields and ground-pounds, tricky Saboteurs call down artillery strikes, and Bio-Specialists unleash poison clouds and flesh-eating nanobot swarms. Using that toxic gas, for instance, means crop dusting areas, then cowering behind the emerald-green mist, while nanobots operate at closer range and promote aggression.

The moment-to-moment rhythm satisfies. When your clip runs dry, by the time you've melee'd mobs so hard they

bounce off the screen then rushed away to increase distance, you'll likely have fresh ammo in your gun to repeat the cycle (and successful active reloads hasten the process). Spinning with a flamethrower on blast, or leading 'Xenos' down a corridor to pick them apart in bursts with a shotgun and leaving the floor strewn with twitching parts, or picking unwitting foes off from distance with a revolver - it's all viable.

Interga-loot-ic planetary

Missions have a certain cadence, too. They all start with a friendly helicopter pilot dropping you off with a good luck message (something along the lines of a cheery "shoot one for me, captain"), then see you either secure perimeters for backup forces, hunt crashed dropships, destroy alien nests, hack into terminals, or fetch a trio of sci-fi macguffins, before the chopper comes back and you can evac. It's an inviting structure, and what prevents it feeling too restrictive is the

fact locations are large enough to host multiple missions.

They're entirely open from the start. You can, for instance, head off-track and Hoover up every available morsel of XP, but it's better to follow the waypoint and complete the 10-15 minute assignment - over 20 missions there's more than enough opportunity to pick maps clean. In one you'll spawn at the south-east of Brazil and fight amongst its dense jungles, and in another come in at the northern tip and cross a destructible shanty town where corrugated sheet metal shacks collapse under bombardment. Or in Pripyat, travelling from its long-abandoned fairground rides, complete with broken-down dodgems, to its rusted and nature-reclaimed military bases. Or in Alaska, venturing between retired settlements and unnatural remnants of alien technology, contrasted against the stark white snow fields. Not only does it lead to a great variety of encounters which encourage you to learn the lines of the environment and leverage it against enemies, but it's awfully pretty, too, and it's often hard to resist the pull of poking your head into all the dark corners.

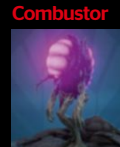
Random events will keep you on your toes. There are the optional ones, like

SHOOTY AND THE BEASTS

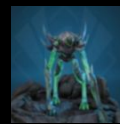
Three tough Xenos and how to take them down



Bug
Shoot their eggs as soon as you see them to prevent them spawning. After they die these scuttlers leave a pool of lava that's easy to tread in, so always leave a second or two before advancing.

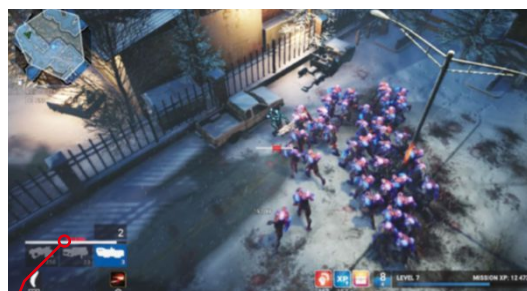


Combustor
This putrid bag of volatile chemicals surgically grafted to a host explodes when you're near. Treat it as a blessing rather than curse by using it to blow up its mates.

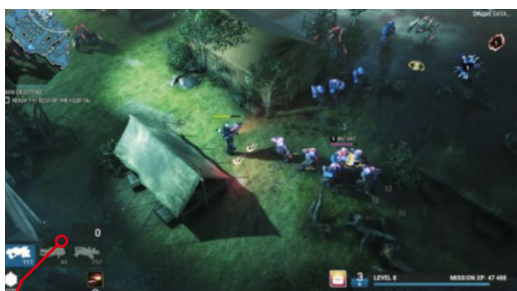


Ghost
Among the trickiest enemies, Ghosts warp in and smack you with stalk-like limbs before cowardly teleporting away. Since this means close-range fighting, it's perfect for point-blank shotgun spreads.

"BIO-SPECIALISTS UNLEASH POISON CLOUDS AND FLESH-EATING NANOBOT SWARMS"



Going alone can get seriously tough, especially in the game's later levels - it's definitely built for co-op play.



Want a closer look at your foes? Between missions you can check out a bestiary of every alien type you've killed.

Want to be annoying in squad multiplayer? Spend ages in the menu customising your loadout so no one can progress.

killing tough Xenos commanders or triggering a short siege section, and those entirely more unpredictable. Occasionally you'll get an 'incoming horde' warning on your screen as hundreds of aliens teleport in and give chase. This leads to one epic moment for us at the end of a mission: upon reaching the landing zone and calling in the chopper, we spot an unclaimed bit of gear in the corner and run to get it, only to in the process suddenly attract the ire of a horde. Now we have several dozen charging infantry to deal with, and a slither of remaining health to dispatch them. What follows is a desperate battle, utilizing every tool in our arsenal to avoid taking damage and get to the chopper in one piece. We suppose we have our own complacent selves to blame. But maybe the evil aliens too.

Horde games

Indeed, it's difficult to get mad when the action is this impressive, alternating between moments of peaceful tranquility and sheer chaos. But even when alien snipers are training plasma rifles on you, flailing behemoths are rupturing the Earth, and lava beetles are cascading

from molten eggs, events are easy to follow thanks to your character's twinned torch and laser sight cutting through all that smoke and colour.

Adding to your repertoire of moves, you can vault over objects with L1, but a cover shooter this isn't. Laying into waves of enemies from behind the safety of a waist-high wall would have made everything far too easy. Instead, you use cover as a sort of windbreaker in order to put something solid between you and the enemy. Later when Alienation starts borrowing bullet hell elements and throws patterns of projectiles at you, taking cover becomes important.

What's less well implemented is four-player online co-op, in which you choose from a list of potential hosts before each mission. You're often dropped into games halfway through, with unbalanced enemies due to spotty level-matching. The lack of local multiplayer is baffling, and the 'Invasions' system even more so. Apparently you can enter someone's match and disrupt their progress Dark-Souls-style, but you're never told how this actually works. That's a theme here. Many concepts are left unexplained for you to stumble upon, including

destroying respawn points for bonus loot, and an entire system of upgrading weapons and re-rolling their stats.

Once you reach the summit of Alienation's learning curve you'll find a compelling sci-fi shoot-and-loot with tremendous scope for expression, with three classes boasting distinct abilities, weapons to spec your way, and simply stupid amounts of enemies to test your tactics on. Understanding how combining upgrade orbs boosts their levels, and how different slots boost their power, means you can start maximising attacks, for instance, or make a gun with a fearsomely large clip, or melt unwanted equipment down and turn it into resources which can then be put towards improving others. There's definite depth to be found here.

After each short mission you'll sort through looted guns, resources, and grenades like the space marine equivalent of a gold-panning prospector, bringing boomerang bombs and a rocket launcher into one game and mines with a minigun for the next. As you reinvent yourself every 15 minutes, so Housemarquee continues to reimagine its top-down template. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ Blasting through aliens is seriously satisfying.
- ✓ The search for new gear makes for a compelling loop.

GM HATES...

- ✗ There's no local multiplayer, and online isn't handled well.
- ✗ Lone wolves might find later challenges insurmountable.

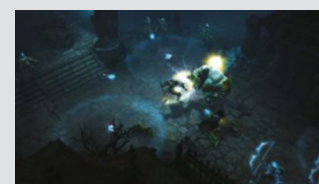
Better than...



Dead Nation

Adding a loot loop on top of Dead Nation's responsive shooting gives your actions more purpose than in Housemarquee's prior effort.

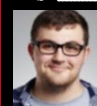
Worse than...



Diablo III

Blizzard's gold standard dungeon-crawler lasts longer, and has a far greater variety of classes, abilities, and items to go along with it.

2ND OPINION



"Once you manage to stop your jaw unhinging itself from how phenomenally gorgeous Alienation is, you'll be able to enjoy one of PS4's best top-down shooters. It's just a shame that you'll need a wiki guide by your side to figure out the game's upgrade systems."
Ben Tyrer, Staff Writer, OPM

GM JUDGEMENT

76%



Although poorly explained in places, there're plenty of thrills in this top-down loot shooter.

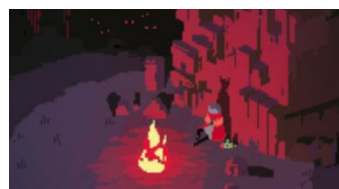
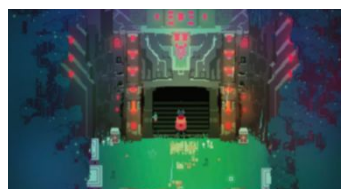
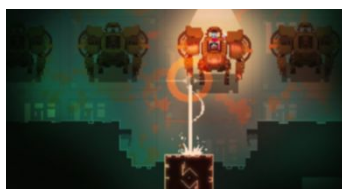
Ben Griffin

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



You can pick one of three fiendish paths from the outset, each one leading to a diverse map to explore.



Format PC Publisher Heart Machine Developer Heart Machine ETA Out now Players 1

HYPER LIGHT DRIFTER

Maybe tomorrow he'll want to settle down

Do you want to feel awesome? Because this top down indie mash up of Zelda's action RPG sensibilities, Dark Souls' narrative obtuseness, and the colour palette of a bowl of tropical Skittles will allow you to feel just that.

You play as the titular hobo, knocking about expansive districts of what appears to be a post-apocalypse populated by anthropomorphic animals. Despite the retro bubblegum veneer, this is a game filled with darkness, from glitchy asides where your terminally ill avatar stops to cough up pixelated puddles of blood, to mounds of bunny-eared bodies, the remnants of a horrific genocide committed before your hurting hero's arrival. But while these grim elements juxtapose suitably enough with the dulcet tunes and the retro visuals, HLD's abstract story is never capable of delivering appreciable twists and turns of the sort you might discover when digging into the

lore of other, similarly mysterious games (ok, yes, we're talking about Dark Souls).

Not that you'll find too much time to complain about that. For the most part you'll navigate areas, taking on multiple foes at once in a dizzying escalation of bullets, blades, and bombs. The Drifter can dash, swing his laser sword for an effective melee combo, and also has access to a few upgradeable firearms with limited ammo capacities. In a neat twist, you can recharge your guns by dealing melee strikes, and so you find yourself dancing between the two offensive styles, attacking up close and from distance in equal measure.

But for that one time in each encounter when you succeed and feel like a cyberpunk dervish, there will invariably be several attempts prior where you'll meet a sticky, frustrating end. Death won't set you back too far, instead plopping you down outside the room you met your end in, so it's easy enough to find yourself in a quick-fire attempt/death cycle much like you would in Hotline Miami.

You've been framed

Grumble time, and forgive us for a second while we get a bit technical. Hyper Light Drifter is locked at 30 frames per second (though we did encounter some droopage below that figure) and as such you have very few frames of animation in which to react to incoming damage. Other 30fps melee-based combat games that require such quick reflexes, such as DMC or Bloodborne, might throw in a few invincibility frames (sections of an animation in which your character can't take damage) during dodges to compensate. Hyper Light Drifter doesn't, which means death at the hands of crazily fast-moving enemies/projectiles can feel unfair. It doesn't help that a top-down pixelated view means combat can get messy on screen, lacking the clarity that would complement a high difficulty curve.

So while its combat is devilishly fun, its visuals glorious, and its soundtrack our new favourite Spotify playlist (give it a whirl regardless of if you're keen on the idea of the rest of the game), it ends up drifting just a little too far into frustration-littered waters, where hard-earned success can blow you over with relief, but without the waves of accompanying satisfaction to justify your torn out follicles. ■

"DESPITE THE RETRO BUBBLEGUM VENEER, THIS IS A GAME FILLED WITH DARKNESS"

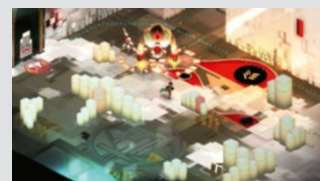
GM LOVES...

- ✓ The pixelated style is sumptuous and full of colourful detail.
- ✓ The lovingly crafted soundtrack is the absolute business.

GM HATES...

- ✗ High difficulty sometimes frustrates, and can feel unfair.
- ✗ Some will be turned off by the abstractly-told story.

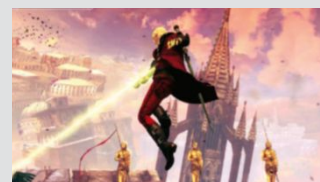
Better than...



Transistor

Slightly broken combat nerfed this otherwise gorgeous and utterly unique sci-fi prospect. It boasted a cracking soundtrack, mind.

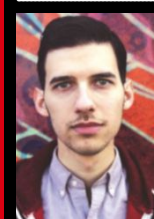
Worse than...



DMC: Devil May Cry

Doubters be damned, this reboot is still current-gen's best third-person twitch combat bonanza. Apart from Bayonetta 2, natch.

I NEED TO KNOW



Get your ears wrapped around the works of aural artist Disasterpeace, the chap responsible for this soundtrack as well as that of Fez. You'll find his work on his website at: <http://bit.ly/gmdisas>

GM JUDGEMENT

78%



Sizzling hot combat notched by unflinching difficulty.
Matt Sakuraoka-Gillman



Format PS4 (reviewed), PC Publisher Dodge Roll Developer Devolver Digital ETA Out now Players 1

ENTER THE GUNGEON

Number one with a bullet

Given the fact that our pastime seems to be so utterly obsessed with guns, it's a wonder that our digital firearms aren't more interesting. Triple-A developers especially seem dedicated to lustily authentic recreations of real world weapons, pouring millions of man hours into the same old Desert Eagles and M16s. Dodge Roll has chosen a different path, delivering a game that makes guns fun again.

Because Enter The Gungeon possesses a sense of playfulness that permeates everything from its barmy tutorial to the delightfully cutesy creatures that populate its halls. It's a roguelike, yes, and therefore demanding, intense, and often cruel. But it's also a bouncy and colourful take on the top-down shooter, featuring scores of weird weapons, inventive items, and big bad bosses.

So, as you barrel into each of the Gungeon's procedurally-generated rooms,

you'll find yourself greeted with a lurid staccato of glowing projectiles and tottering baddies. And since even the simplest of encounters can quickly descend into bullet hell nuttiness, you'll have to prioritise targets carefully, weaving your way through a web of incoming fire and making judicious use of your dodge roll to pass through projectiles unscathed.

Bullet heaven

The Gungeon itself, meanwhile, is a world that's stylised but grounded, offering a surprising amount of exuberant interaction. You'll flip tables to use as makeshift cover, upending dinnerplates and glassware in the process. You'll send red barrels rolling across the screen with a carefree kick before unleashing their explosive payload with a well-placed bullet. And you'll unmoor chandeliers from their precarious fastenings, watching as they crush clusters of enemies under a ton of dazzling crystal.

A cast of four playable 'Gungeoners' further enables a diversity of approaches. Each comes with their own items, perks,

and firearms; the Marine, for example, offers precision accuracy and heavy armour, while the Pilot's charm provides a handy discount with merchants.

But while its selection of swivel-eyed weaponry is very much Enter The Gungeon's selling point, the arsenal on offer here is surprisingly uneven, and occasionally even underwhelming. There can be no arguing with the sheer delight inspired by a firearm that fires flailing fish or high-threadcount pillows, but the starting weapons for each character feel disappointingly weedy, making the early stages of any run at the Gungeon comparatively limp.

What's more, ammo is distributed by means of oddly stingy random drops, meaning that your hands-on time with each new weapon can be disappointingly brief. It's galling to discover a laser-spewing demon head, for example, only to have to revert back to your feeble pistol once you burn through your meagre stock of infernal ammunition.

But these occasional frustrations are trumped by the relentless intensity of each encounter, by the puckish ingenuity of the game's boss designs, and by the blend of gleeful silliness and action movie cool that comprises its pixel-art game world. The Gungeon may be unforgiving, but it's also unabashed in its playfulness, wit, and warmth. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ The world is gorgeously grubby and engagingly physical.
- ✓ A playful energy runs through the entire experience.
- ✓ The bracingly hardcore gameplay demands precision.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Inconsistent weapon design can leave the early game feeling flat.

Better than...



Risk of Rain

A similarly shooty take on the roguelike, featuring fast-paced combat and a stiff sense of challenge. Gungeon offers a more likeable world, though.

Worse than...



Nuclear Throne

The two are undoubtedly similar, but Vlambeer delivers more satisfying core gunplay alongside its own arsenal of madcap weaponry.

NEED TO KNOW



This is the first game from Dodge Roll, a new studio formed by ex-employees of the now closed MMO developer Mythic Entertainment, known for Dark Age Of Camelot and Warhammer Online.

GM JUDGEMENT

84%



A charmingly exuberant blend of punishing roguelike convention and gleeful blasting.
James Nouch

"EVEN THE SIMPLEST OF ENCOUNTERS QUICKLY DESCENDS INTO BULLET HELL NUTTINESS"

GM Review

The Final Verdict!

NOW PLAYING

This month's biggest time sinks on Team GM



1 DARK SOULS III PS4

On my second playthrough now and still loving every minute. Really enjoying digging into multiplayer, which feels so much faster and smoother than in previous Souls games.

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman, Editor

2 DISHONORED: DEFINITIVE EDITION PS4

I leapt back in determined to finally achieve a full 'no kills' run. Murder spree kicked off about halfway through the first mission. Snap.

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman, Editor



3 FALLOUT 4 PC

The new Automatron DLC gives me everything I ever wanted in a game: the ability to create a killer spider-legged robot with drills for arms and the head of a teddy bear.

Ben Griffin, Senior Staff Writer

4 THE DIVISION PC

This month I dived into the Falcon Lost update. It's fun, but considering the work that's gone into the city, why is the Incursion underground?

Ben Griffin, Senior Staff Writer



5 DIVINITY: ORIGINAL SIN PC

I've finally gotten a mate to play through this brilliant RPG with me in co-op! He brings the water magic, I bring the fire, together we... cancel each other out. Um.

Robin Valentine, Production Editor

6 THE LAST OF US REMASTERED PS4

Now I'm done with Uncharted, I've moved on to Naughty Dog's latest - another I shamefully never played.

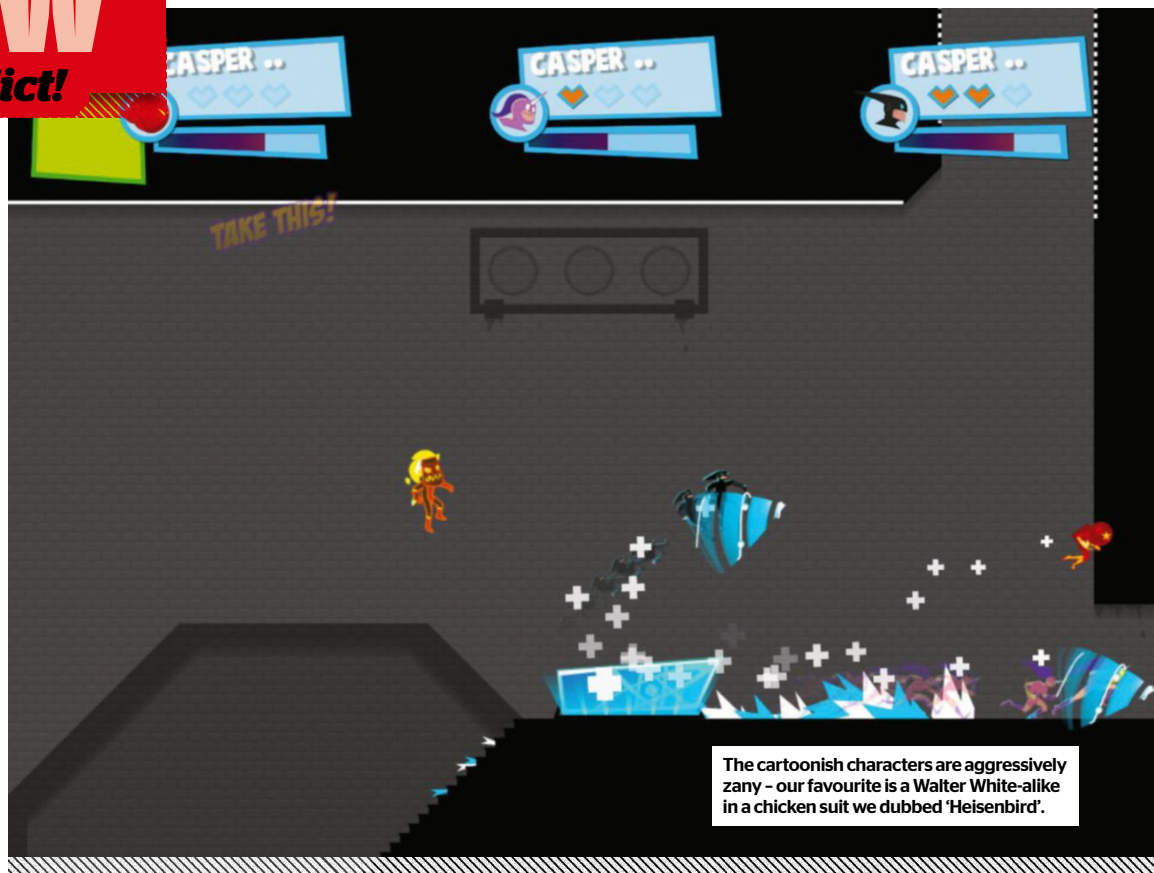
Robin Valentine, Production Editor



OFFICE LUNCHTIME GAME OF THE MONTH:

TOWERFALL PS4

Robin and Ben have been playing the surprisingly solid co-op. It'd be a great team bonding exercise if they didn't keep shooting each other by mistake.



The cartoonish characters are aggressively zany - our favourite is a Walter White-alike in a chicken suit we dubbed 'Heisenbird'.

Format PC Publisher Tinybuild Games Developer Tinybuild Games, Doubledutch Games ETA Out now Players 1-4

SPEEDRUNNERS

Energetic multiplayer platformer is just the jog

Trying to describe this competitive gem recalls those lazy movie posters you see on the London

Underground. 'It's like Micro Machines meets Canabalt, with grappling hooks, on [a drug]!' Full of great ideas borrowed from loads of disparate games, the result is an exhilarating oddity that is in itself a gaming cliché - immediately easy to comprehend, but satisfyingly tough to master...

Four players race through twisting, 2D levels packed with traps, levers, lifts, and blades. If a player falls behind the pack they're eliminated like a sickly gazelle, and the process continues until one victorious runner remains. It's brought to life by two cunning additions. Firstly, the screen shrinks as the game progresses, limiting your field of vision and reducing the distance you can fall behind before being eliminated. It's so smartly done you won't even notice it to start with - instead, you'll just wonder why everything is suddenly so much more difficult and stressful (and

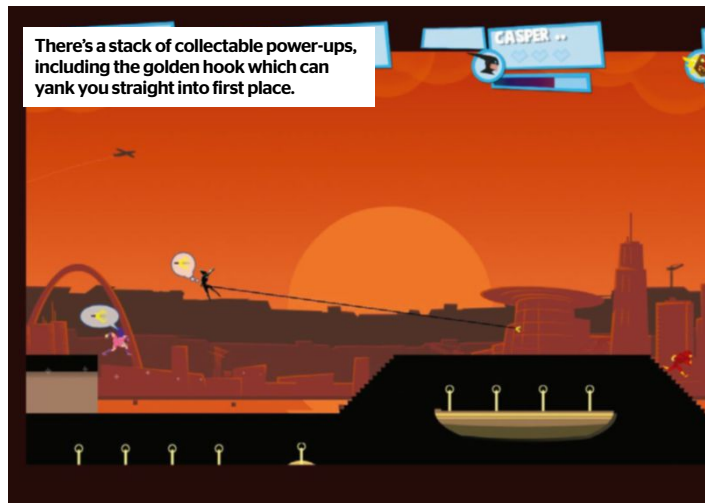
why your eye is twitching). Secondly, there's the grappling hook. This attaches to white panels found in every level, and swings you over gaps and around corners. It's possible to launch your grapple as you fall and use it to propel yourself forward at preposterous speeds.

Getting hooked

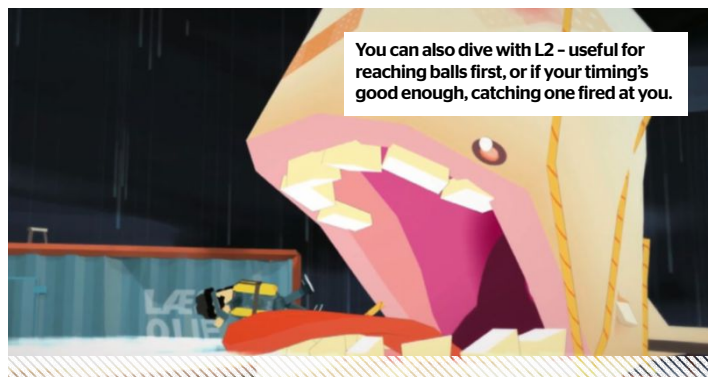
Using it feels *amazing*. There's a real sense of reckless momentum, and a perfectly executed swing can completely change the flow of the game. This leads to the only major grumble about Speedrunners: to be competitive, you'll really need to learn each level inside out, and it sometimes feels like a test of memory rather than in-the-moment skill. It's still great fun, but it becomes a different game when played with people who know every jump, slide and optimum grapple point.

If you can play Speedrunners locally with a few friends it's irresistible, shouty fun. In the office, we racked up over 100 hours just playing the pre-release maps during Early Access, and were forced to move to a quiet room because we were too vocal. It's less fun played online against seasoned runners, unfortunately, but still a multiplayer experience that recalls the golden age of competitive couch gaming. **Matt Elliott**

85%



There's a stack of collectable power-ups, including the golden hook which can yank you straight into first place.



You can also dive with L2 - useful for reaching balls first, or if your timing's good enough, catching one fired at you.

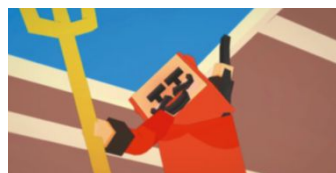
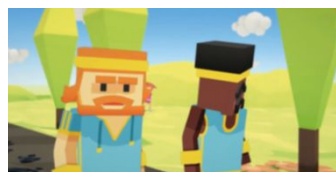
Format PS4 (reviewed), PC **Pub** Curve **Dev** Game Swing **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-4

STIKBOLD A DODGEBALL ADVENTURE

Get the Hell out of dodge

When the actual Devil crashes your gym and kidnaps Heidi Starbrow, the big Swedish dodgeball tournament is jeopardised. Luckily Björn fancies her enough to join his teammate Jerome for an epic rescue mission. No one wants to just win by forfeit after all.

From one-on-one faceoffs to multi-team showdowns, the aim is grabbing a ball and hitting opponents twice to knock them out. Björn soon regrets his quest when he discovers chaos outside the gym's cushy confines. Arenas include busy roundabouts where players chuck beehives and push each other into rampaging hippy vans, a tsunami-hit beach featuring pinching crabs and



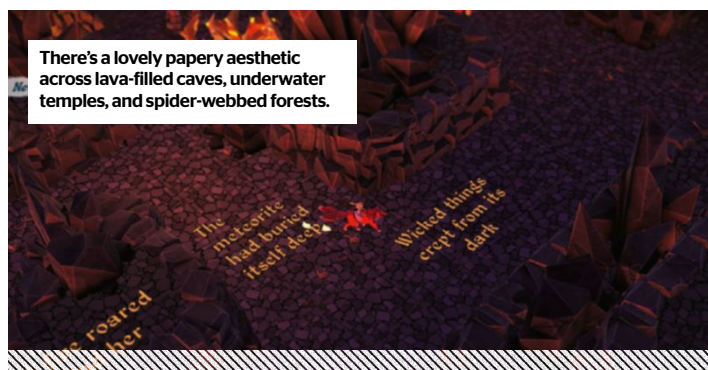
frisbees, and an oil rig in which 'death by falling whale' is a distinct possibility.

Extra techniques add depth to a basic framework. Holding R2 determines the power of your shot, which you can use to fake out opponents, and punching knocks balls out of rivals' hands. If your angle's blocked by, say, a hotdog vendor or flapping swan, the right stick applies curl to shots and R1 passes to partners. Get hit and you'll get to harass from court-side, using sharks to chomp players or grabbing their ankles as a streaker.

You'll complete the story in an hour, but tackling each stage's three additional challenges wrings a few more rounds out of it. It's short and simple, but if you've got a co-op buddy to tackle the tough side goals with, it shines like a freshly waxed gymnasium. ■

Ben Griffin

68%



There's a lovely papery aesthetic across lava-filled caves, underwater temples, and spider-webbed forests.

Format PC **Publisher** Plug In Digital **Developer** Fishing Cactus **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

EPISTORY TYPING CHRONICLES

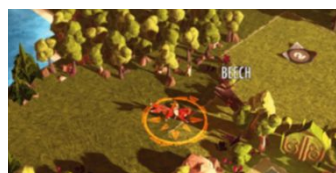
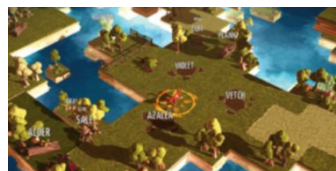
Proses are read...

From one perspective, Epistory is a peculiar adventure-puzzler starring a girl riding a fox through an oragami world terrorized by insects. From another, it's a beautiful metaphor for the creative process...

Typing Chronicles uses a keyboard and nothing else. WASD controls your fox, and Enter roots you to the spot. From here you type random words that pop above frozen

lakes, ignitable pyres, or charging bugs. The likes of 'begonia' or 'daffodil' sprout flowers, 'cryogenic' or 'icicle' thaw ice shelves, and 'woe', 'rot', and for some reason, 'yoga', obliterate creepy crawlies. Successful entries grant inspiration points to open portals bridging lands.

By solving puzzles (tread on symbols in the right order, burn torches before they snuff out) the story literally unfolds, prose jotted on a rustling craft paper environment conveying the protagonist's struggles with penning her novel. One



early scenario involves entering the rift caused by a meteor, which represents a cataclysmic life event, and emerging stronger for it. See, 'inspiration points' accumulated across the world are spent on speed and damage boosts. Sieges against insect swarms (online trolls?) test your reflexes, and later, your versatility as you switch between freezing and burning magic by typing 'ice' and 'fire'.

While the story is sweetly told and superbly written, ("the air felt heavy as if laced with sadness"/"bitter taste of corruption clung to the land like a scar") its typing falls flat. You never truly feel you're contributing to someone's artistic rehabilitation - just echoing on-screen commands to progress to the next area. It's far from the twee indie game it looks, but unfortunately words fail it.

■ **Ben Griffin**

71%

HOT DOWNLOADS

The latest DLC and expansions explored

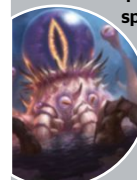


Fallout 4 DLC is releasing quicker than Preston Garvey can say "another settlement needs our help". Now you can return to the wasteland to sail over irradiated waters in its biggest expansion yet, *Far Harbor*. You're tasked with the job of finding a missing young woman on an isolated island, but nothing is as simple as it seems, as you're sucked into the growing conflict between the Synth and Children Of The Atom. With a larger landmass than any previous Bethesda add-on, as well as new creatures, dungeons, and faction quests, it'll give you plenty more to do if you've already conquered post-apocalyptic Boston.

If that doesn't float your boat, then you can grab the mic and start singing along to newly-added hit tunes in *Rock Band 4*, such as *Cake By The Ocean* by DNCE and *The Hills* by The Weeknd. Plus, in the oddest decision since Mario invited Bowser karting, Justin Bieber's songs have also joined the playlist. Weezer and Lamb Of God songs are available too, so dust off that plastic guitar.

Once your fingers are limbered up, why not swap out that instrument for an arcade stick for *Street Fighter V*'s latest fighter. Guile, one of the series' most beloved characters, is now playable - famous for being more American than a bald eagle singing *The Star-Spangled Banner*, he'll be bringing some true grit to the fifth instalment of the famous fighting series. And a million *Sonic Booms*, of course.

If you'd rather sort out your conflicts with a friendly game of cards than a fist fight, then maybe *Hearthstone*'s new expansion is more your speed. Watch out though - the tentacular *Whispers Of The Old Gods* is rife with unknowable ancient evils, introducing new Lovecraftian spells, minions, and weapons to corrupt your decks.



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JUNE 2016 **GM** 85

RetroMaster

We ♥ Old Games!

Not the most elegant takedown, but it'll do. As a fatally inattentive guard fails to keep tabs on Princess Kiku for his evil master, Rikimaru nobbles him.



TENCHU: STEALTH ASSASSINS

Join the clan with the plan in feudal Japan



Sunning contact with others, they lurk in shadow. Their lives are dedicated to a sinister trade best plied without witnesses; few have ever seen them abroad in daylight. And back in 1998 they gave Tenchu really good scores. Ha ha, yes! It was a funny joke about videogame journalists all along! Hang on...

The origins

Now, everyone reading this knows Konami and Kojima, daddies of Metal Gear. Many will have heard of Looking Glass Studios for their work on Thief. Which is why it seems unjust that so few will be familiar with Acquire Corp, the third big player in that great awakening of stealth gameplay. It was Acquire who led our ninja friends into the spotlight, or at least invited them to scoot around the edges of the spotlight chucking poisoned rice balls to attract other mugs for them to stab.

When sneaking's your top priority, nobody beats a shinobi – and yet they're called upon for their capacity to smash

every face in the room far more often than their ability to slink around unnoticed. That changed when a 3D game world became a feasible thing. Acquire, taking cues from the framework of Tomb Raider and Konami's fast-approaching Metal Gear Solid, began building a stealth-focused game within these new rules.

It was all set to star a sci-fi New York cop descended from a ninja, until someone looked at this idea objectively and went "what?" before urgently dragging it back to 16th century basics. And so it was that prior to the arrival of MGS and Thief, we hooked up with Rikimaru and Ayame to pledge our blades to the perennially needy Lord Gohma of the Azuma clan.

The legend

Tenchu's ambience and assassination angle helped it stand out from the clandestine class of 1998. All 10 of its assignments took place at night, deepening the cloak-and-dagger atmosphere as a handy side-effect of covering up the PS1's rubbish draw distance. Your basic ninja toolkit

Developer Acquire
Publisher Activision
Released 1998
Format PS1
Get it Ebay, Amazon

contained not just shuriken, caltrops, and toxin-drizzled rice, but a grappling hook to make traversal as easy as a low-tech Just Cause without the carjacking and exploding power stations, and even an early form of grenade for those times when stealth went down the toilet.

Not that our skulking antiheroes were unfit for a scuffle. Rikimaru's scything ninjato sword left chaos in its wake, while Ayame was a whirlwind of health-wrecking twin-bladed combos. Nevertheless, as stressed in your terse nuggets of pre-mission guidance, going gung-ho was firmly discouraged. The only sure path to that coveted Grand Master status was to stay completely undetected

and trigger one scarlet pixel-spurting stealth kill after another.

Whether you were spider-swinging across the rooftops of a merchant's estate or fleet-footing through a midnight forest, you wouldn't get far without pausing to send the camera swooping like an obese barn owl to pinpoint nearby guards, wild animals and the occasional supernatural menace. But beyond that, Tenchu's level design nurtured initiative. Mission goals could be target-based or destination-based, though the machinations of big boss Lord Mei-oh barely even registered until the final stage, which was a pretty pants PR effort for a self-styled King Of Hell.

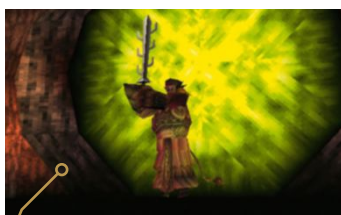
The legacy

To date, Tenchu has fallen somewhere between stealthy shelfmates MGS and Thief in terms of sustaining its success.

**"STAY COMPLETELY UNDETECTED
AND TRIGGER ONE SCARLET PIXEL-
SPURTING KILL AFTER ANOTHER"**



Ayame after gutting a witless jailer: "Hurry up and die." Ice cold.



Your henchman? Yep, killed him dead. He'll be back though. He's like that.

Over time it's strayed dangerously close to the Van Damme career trajectory - still releasing titles regularly, but going straight to DVD after being filmed in Bulgaria on a budget of roughly £22.

There's no insurmountable reason for this state of affairs to continue. Original developer Acquire is still in play, and has kept its stabbing arm strong with the Way Of The Samurai and Shinobido series. Meanwhile, current Tenchu rights holder From Software is on the roll of a lifetime with all things Souls. So great things may yet happen.

Even if that's not how it pans out, modern games owe Tenchu a debt for validating a different approach to gameplay. Confident as we are that games such as shouty brawler Hitman: Noisy Assassin and steampunk army FPS Death Before Dishonored would have been a blast to play in a different reality, it's important that there's always a slightly subtler alternative approach. So we're optimistic that the time of the assassins will sidle around once more. Besides, they left us on an unresolved cliffhanger eight years ago, and even for silently amoral death-dealers, that's just rude. ■

Series Spotlight

A long flirtation with assassination



1 Tenchu 2: Birth Of The Stealth Assassins

(PS1 - 2000)

Rather than immediately line up a new big bad for our seasoned tag team throat-slitters, Acquire chose the path of the prequel. No drastic changes, but the new moves, a level editor, and a third playable Azuma slasher in Tatsumaru, ticked all the right boxes for anyone already on board the Tenchu love train.



2 Tenchu: Wrath Of Heaven

(PS2 - 2003)

First ninja-hop to a new generation and, for many, the high point of the series. New dev K2 took the helm for the next few years, but peaked early with the advances here: multiplayer modes, interwoven narratives, and unlockable special moves. Plus a new character, the pragmatic killer doctor with a sneeze for a name, Tesshu. Later updated for Xbox as Return From Darkness.



3 Tenchu: Fatal Shadows

(PS2 - 2004)

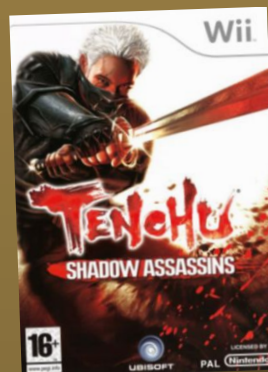
Rikimaru smoke-bombed himself onto the sidelines as Ayame met up with new kunoichi Rin for more technically wobbly killery-pokery. Their fraught relationship showed promise, limited only by the usual tragicomic Tenchu voice acting, but it was clear that the series wasn't adapting at the pace of other big stealth players - the start of a worrying slide into B-list territory.



4 Tenchu Z

(Xbox 360 - 2006)

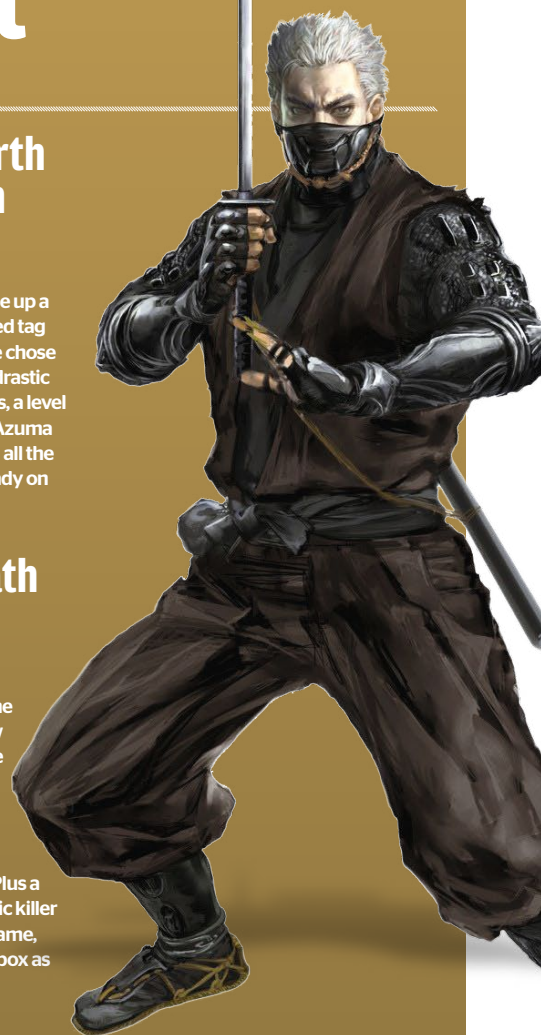
After an interval of handheld-only spin-offs (Time Of The Assassins on PSP and Dark Secret on DS), the next console outing promised great things for this slow-to-grow series, from character customising to online co-op. Alas, these were footnotes on a growing ninja scroll of woe. Repetitive design. Ropey graphics and mechanics. Enemies with the AI of jacket potatoes. Fun was still achievable with tenacity, but only the hardcore managed it.



5 Tenchu: Shadow Assassins

(Wii, PSP - 2008)

Acquire's return for what they called Tenchu 4, disregarding everything since Wrath Of Heaven, restored some faith but also made a number of contentious calls. The core game, while well made, felt compromised (combat was a Wiimote minigame and the grappling hook was gone), and releasing it without fanfare for Wii - not big on games about death in dark alleys - was market seppuku.



SIX OF THE BEST...

STEALTH EXPERTS

Providing testimonials for our stealth and safety professionals

Furtive. Excellent word. If GM reviewed words, furtive would score 92%. It's also a state of being that's well-proven for entertainment purposes: we wanted to call this spread Six Of The Best Furtive Funsters, but that made us think of Stephen King's It and get all uncomfortable. The point is that being light of step and loose of morals tends to pay off better in games than real life, with no end of opportunities to exploit that combination. Slippery sorts have infiltrated ensemble casts across all genres - Knights Of The Old Republic street urchin Mission Vao, Team Fortress' balacava-clad Spy, Borderlands' ninja nutter Zero - but how many heroes who hide in the shadows can carry a game as well as the stabbin' stars of Dishonored ?? Let's risk a look back at a few who did. Furtively. ■

GARRETT

Thief: The Dark Project
(PC - 1998)

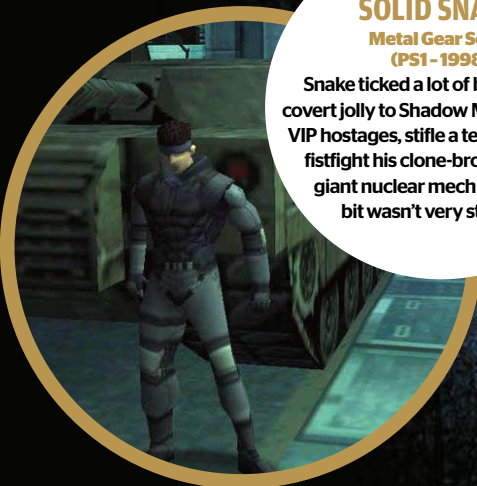
Despite trying to avoid scuffles by using wacky toys such as water and moss arrows, he still lost an eye (stealth can do that to you) but got a mechanical one from the techno-cultist Hammerites, who worship Bob the Builder.



SOLID SNAKE

Metal Gear Solid
(PS1 - 1998)

SNAKE ticked a lot of boxes on his covert jolly to Shadow Moses: free the VIP hostages, stifle a terrorist threat, fistfight his clone-bro on top of a giant nuclear mech tank. That bit wasn't very stealthy.



SLY COOPER

Sly Raccoon
(PS2 - 2002)

Sole animal on our list (sorry Sam Stoat Safebreaker), Sly comes from a long, proud line of master thieves. He also carries a cane with style and hangs out with a turtle and a hippo, which is more than Garrett can say.



SABOTEUR

Saboteur

(CPC, C64, Spectrum - 1985)

Sabotage in this case involved hiding from dogs and lobbing bricks at guards, as your nameless ninja scuttled around a security complex looking for a floppy disk to nick. Sab's sister Nina took the lead in the progressive sequel.



RIDDICK

Escape from Butcher Bay
(PC, Xbox - 2004)

Big lout that he was, bare-fisted or tooled up with a shiv or shotgun, old Vin still used a predatory prowl to escape Space Jail in this Pitch Black prequel. The Eyesine completed his transition to neck-snapping night owl.



SAM FISHER

Splinter Cell

(PC, GameCube, Xbox, PS2 - 2002)

Veteran infiltrator who's been there, done all that. Navy SEAL, CIA asset, Third Echelon field agent, Fourth Echelon commander, Krav Maga black belt, no relation to the Hive god Crota. Probably.

Grab Bag

Retro gems from every era



Awesome Boss!



Ninja Combat

Format Neo Geo, Arcade **Developer** Alpha Denshi **Released** 1991

While this scrolling scrapper wasn't really a radiant star of the Neo Geo's launch line-up, it did boast some inventively mental bosses culminating in Genyousai - a fire-spewing, screen-filling precursor to the likes of Apocalypse and Onslaught, with huge fists that you could quite graphically sever. It was fine though! They grew back! Until you tore his head off too.

Classic Moment!



Devil May Cry 3

Format PC, PS2 **Developer** Capcom **Released** 2005

Getting DMC back on track meant increasing the instances of senseless, guffawing cool, hence Dante borrowing a motorbike and screeching up the side of a tower. But, mused Capcom, could this scene somehow be even more ridiculous/excellent? Certainly, if Dante proceeded to dismount in mid-air and swing the bike like a club to demolish a mob of demonic fodder.

Remake Request!



Jet Rider

Format PC, PS1 **Developer** Singletrac **Released** 1997

Imagine Wave Race spliced with Wipeout, as made by the minds behind Twisted Metal. Then add head-on 'suicide tracks' and an energy beam grappling hook to that kooky mental collage. Voila: Jet Moto (or Jet Rider here in the UK), which managed three PS1 games before vanishing. Now that all its old rivals lie dormant, time to bring back the offbeat, slightly off-its-head challenger?

Expect to don a headset in more and more places as the entertainment industry gets to grips with its potential.



A LICENCE TO THRILL

We don headsets with virtual reality pros **Simon Reveley** and **Graham Breen** to discover exciting new ways VR is being used in entertainment

It's pitch black. We can't see our hand in front of our faces. A soldier with a gun turns a torch on. She's on our side but wary. Three gurgling undead chased us into this room and now there's no way out. Only swinging tarpaulin covered bodies who hopefully won't wake up, and the groaning, echoing zombies in the hallway. They batter the door. The soldier fires off a warning shot and in the small space our ears ring. Is this a game? All safe and warm inside a virtual reality headset? We wish.

This is Virtually Dead. A 'live theatre event' to coincide with the release of the HTC Vive VR headset. 35 actors. A top secret East End London location - well, it's near Hackney Wick train station - and a pitch black warehouse full of more than a kilometre of corridors and tunnels. Our phones and belongings are taken from us on entry, new 'recruits' are forced into jumpsuits and then we're led in for a bout of VR training to battle a deadly infection which has decimated Arizona. It's a good thing that it's 'perfectly safe' and all of the infected in the building are just being used for science purposes, right? That's definitely not why we're now stuck in a room and about to crawl through a very real hole in the wall behind a set of shelves.

No VRguments

10,000 people willingly follow us through Virtually Dead which, despite running for a three week period, sold out in a matter of days. Proudly in the middle of what production company Bearded Kitten calls a 'VR sandwich' is the gaming experience, and it's the only bit we don't feel truly terrified in. Before a horrific infection 'containment issue,' a scientist roughly shoved an HTC Vive onto our heads, put the controllers in our hands, and put us through a training simulation. This was actually upcoming zombie shooter Arizona Sunshine but incredibly, mixed with the live theatre and the sheer terror of running around in the dark, it felt perfectly placed. Amidst the screaming, this was an amazing addition before the inevitable real life horde took chase.

"We've been showing the Vive a lot across the past year at a lot of gaming shows, tech shows and so on but actually getting it to a wider public - showing not just great VR and what VR should be like but showing it in a fun way - was important," explains HTC product manager Graham Breen once we've crawled out of a hole after 40 minutes of relentless fear. "Nobody really knew how this would play out. Whether people would love it or hate it. We're seeing as we go. What we're seeing so far is great feedback. Potentially it can go a lot further, there's no question about it."



We were instructed to wear red so as to be easily recognised by 'military personnel'.

Virtually Dead isn't the only VR experience shaking up entertainment though. Theme park Alton Towers has just added its very first virtual reality rollercoaster, and this is no simulator. Previously known as Air, the space themed Galactica is an actual flying roller coaster with a maximum speed of 75km - you can now wear a VR headset while you're hurtling along the track. Figment Productions is a VR specialist production company that's working with Alton Towers on Galactica and, terrifyingly, Derren Brown on his upcoming virtual reality Ghost Train at Thorpe Park. Yes, it does all take place inside a Victorian train carriage suspended by chains in an abandoned warehouse and no, we're definitely not brave enough to go on it with you.

"With Galactica we were originally inspired by the release of the Samsung Gear VR headset" explains Figment CEO Simon Reveley. "It was the first time that there was an untethered VR lifestyle headset that was really worth its

"ALTON TOWERS HAS JUST ADDED ITS FIRST VIRTUAL REALITY ROLLERCOASTER"



Actors and zombies alike were, err, chewing up the scenery and scaring the living daylights out of us.



If G-Force is your thing, you'll get up to 3.5 Gs on Galactica with speeds of up to 75km an hour.



Astronaut Chris Hadfield was among the first people to test the full Galactica experience - who better than someone who's actually been to space to give it a thumbs up?



salt. When I first saw that come out I started to think 'what about putting it on some roller coasters?' because for the first time it was viable to have a headset that doesn't have to have a PC attached to it."

Sick jokes

We know what you're all thinking: if virtual reality can make us feel queasy on the ground, how will it feel in the air? Sick bags at the ready? Not exactly, and it's all because of what Reveley calls the 'locomotion problem'. "VR has a problem," he confirms. "You can't really move in a way that isn't natural to your living room. The only viable way is to put people on a vehicle that moves and have that vehicle synchronise with the VR. If you want to move in VR and you don't want to throw up everywhere you need to be moving physically in the real world as well."

Galactica is only the beginning of the virtual reality revolution in entertainment. Roller coasters across the

world are upgrading to add an extra level of intensity to our favourite thrill rides, but Reveley is adamant that VR should never just be tacked on. "Virtual reality needs to be part of an integrated project that includes theming elements, the music, the story and the physical experience itself," he says. "That all needs to be integrated. It shouldn't just be plonking something on there because you can put a VR label on it and it'll make everything better. You get in the queue line for Galactica, you see a logo, you see screens with weather reports for other planets and galaxies you're going to visit... I think that as long as it's fully integrated, it's going to be a huge part of the future of the entertainment industry, but for us it shouldn't be a stand alone thing. It should be part of the bigger thing and bigger experience." Get ready for not being able to tell the difference between fiction and reality, and an awful lot of headset hair. ■ **Louise Blain**

Ride this!

If you fancy a jaunt as a space tourist then Galactica is located inside Alton Towers theme park. Find out more here: <http://bit.ly/gmgalactica>



TOAD-ALLY AWESOME

Well, no one said cosplay had to be human. In fact it seems to make it a lot easier to be a Venusaur or an Ivysaur if you are actually a toad in the first place... @Bombina0 on Twitter from Tokyo created the perfect costumes for this pair from paper. They totally... kick grass.

UNREAL TOO

US cosplayer Kilory gets to be the only human cosplayer on this list with her astonishing recreation of Final Fantasy's Lightning. No, this isn't Photoshop -

although professional photography is clearly at work. And this is just the tip of the perfect pink haired iceberg. You can see more images here: <http://bit.ly/gmkilory>

PIG-ACHU

And there we have it, @MORPHEUS_A on Twitter effortlessly wins the eternal cosplay competition in our hearts with this perfect Pokémon guinea pig cosplay. Where to start? The fuzzy baseball cap or the intense look in his eyes that says he'll be the best like no one ever was?



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THE MODERN SHOOTER FINALLY GOES FULL SCI-FI!

ALSO NEXT ISSUE...

PREVIEWED

- The new Battlefield: blown open
- Hands-on with Deus Ex
- Outlast 2 scares us senseless

REVIEWED

- Total War: Warhammer
- Mirror's Edge Catalyst
- Doom

Due to the unpredictable nature of the gaming world, all contents are subject to change.

GAME GUIDE



Welcome to GM's carefully collated list of the most essential gaming experiences you can undertake right now. If even one of the 50 games on here has passed you by, get a shift on post-haste

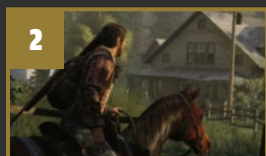


1

DARK SOULS III

PS4 / PC / XO

The first game might be closer to fans' hearts, but this is Souls - and gaming - at its current-gen finest.

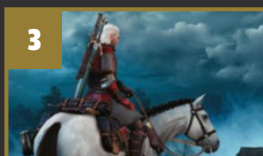


2

THE LAST OF US

PS4 / PS3

Naughty Dog brings all of its strengths to the fore, fusing engaging gameplay with stunning storytelling.

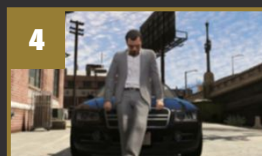


3

THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

PS4 / XO / PC

An epic proposition that truly lives up to its promise. Engaging, mature, and unbelievably vast.

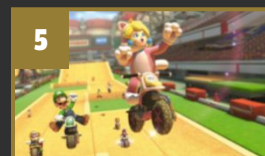


4

GRAND THEFT AUTO V

PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360

The most comprehensive sandbox going, full of wonderful distractions and typical Rockstar humour.

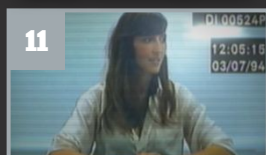


5

MARIO KART 8

Wii U

Reinvention is what Ninty does best, and nowhere is that more apparent than in this joyous karter reborn.

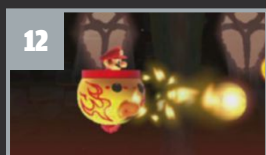


11

HER STORY

PC / Mobile

An engrossing mystery that makes us believe in FMV again. Utterly, wonderfully unique.

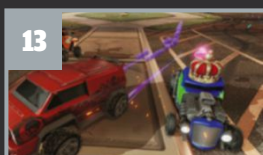


12

SUPER MARIO MAKER

Wii U

The most brilliantly accessible level creation game around, dripping with Nintendo's slick signature style.

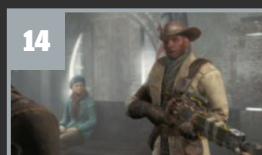


13

ROCKET LEAGUE

PS4 / XO / PC

2015's surprise hit combines football and motors to create an amazingly universal multiplayer experience.

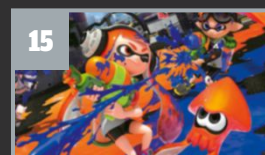


14

FALLOUT 4

PS4 / XO / PC

A hundred little improvements over its predecessor make this trip to the wasteland one worth booking.

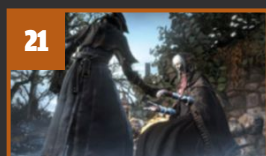


15

SPLATOON

Wii U

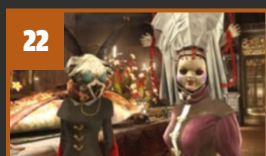
Injects more fun and colour into the online shooter genre than we would've thought possible.



21

BLOODBORNE

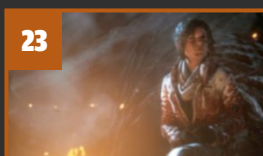
PS4



22

DISHONORED

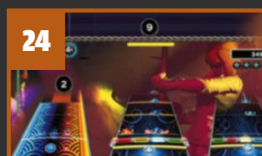
PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360



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RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

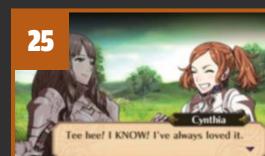
XO / PC



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ROCK BAND 4

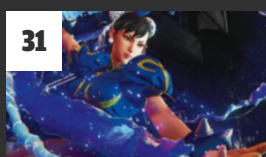
PS4 / XO



25

FIRE EMBLEM AWAKENING

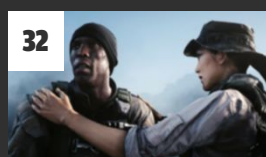
3DS



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STREET FIGHTER V

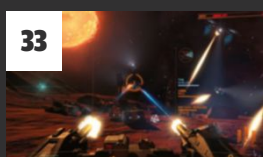
PS4 / PC



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BATTLEFIELD 4

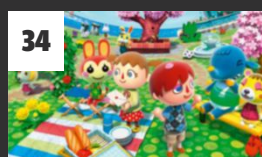
PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360



33

ELITE DANGEROUS

XO / PC



34

ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF

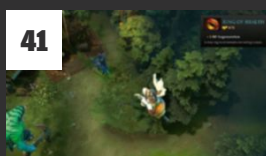
3DS



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SUPERHOT

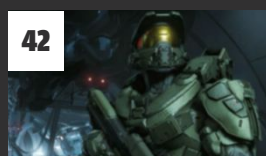
PC



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DOTA 2

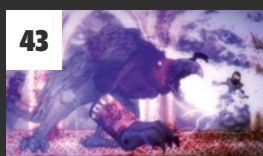
PC



42

HALO 5: GUARDIANS

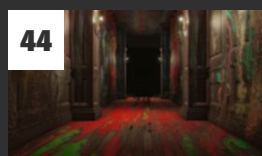
XO



43

SALT & SANCTUARY

PS4



44

LAYERS OF FEAR

PS4 / XO / PC



45

LUIGI'S MANSION 2: DARK MOON

3DS

FORMAT BUYER'S GUIDE

Just bought a spanking new console? Configured a new rig? Or perhaps you've a new handheld ready to go? Whichever machine you've got, GM is here to ensure you're clued in on the top exclusives

PS4

- 1 THE LAST OF US REMASTERED
- 2 JOURNEY
- 3 TOWERFALL ASCENSION
- 4 BLOODBORNE
- 5 RESOGUN



- 1 HALO 5: GUARDIANS
- 2 KALIMBA
- 3 FORZA HORIZON 2
- 4 QUANTUM BREAK
- 5 ORI & THE BLIND FOREST

Wii U

- 1 MARIO KART 8
- 2 SUPER MARIO MAKER
- 3 SPLATOON
- 4 BAYONETTA 2
- 5 SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD

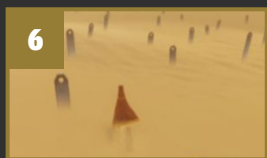
Guilty Pleasure

Team GM comes clean on the games it secretly plays when no-one's watching...



This month Sam Freeman confesses his shameful past with **Pit Fighter**

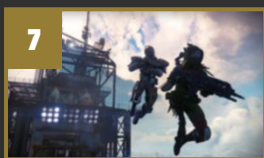
Originally released way back in 1991(!), Pit Fighter was slammed from the outset. The shockingly bad frame rate, terrible soundtrack, and shoddy graphics are all extremely evident now, but at the time I was won over by this slab of SNES beat 'em' up action. For me, it was the digitised character sprites that initially pulled me in – something I hadn't witnessed in a game prior to that point. Beyond this the wow factor was admittedly short-lived, but I always enjoyed an afternoon brawling session with my mates. At least until Street Fighter II wiped it off the face of the Earth anyway!



6 JOURNEY

PS4 / PS3

This intensely emotional trip through a strange, beautiful world is a truly spellbinding display of games as art.



7 DESTINY: THE TAKEN KING

PS4 / X0 / PS3 / 360

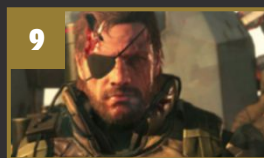
One year and three chunks of DLC later and Bungie has finally made Destiny the shooter-RPG it was meant to be.



8 TOWERFALL ASCENSION

PS4 / PC / PS Vita

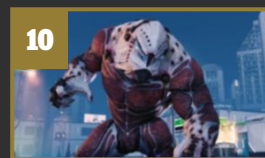
Still nothing on current-gen has come close to matching the multiplayer thrills found in this twitchy battler.



9 METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

PS4 / X0 / PC / PS3 / 360

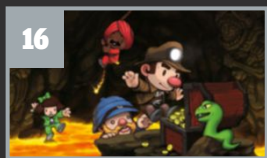
Hideo's last hurrah brings open-world action to the revered series.



10 XCOM 2

PC

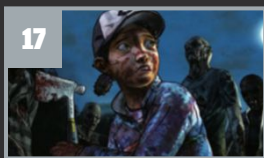
Turn-based strategy gold that doesn't pull its punches. Try not to get too attached to your soldiers, eh?



16 SPELUNKY

PS4 / PC / PS3 / 360 / PS Vita

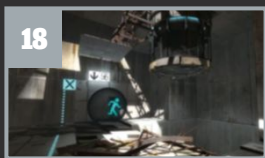
Tight, brutally challenging, and endlessly replayable – this is the defining action roguelike.



17 THE WALKING DEAD

PS4 / X0 / PC / PS3 / 360 / PS Vita / Mobile

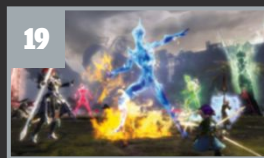
Both seasons display some of the finest storytelling in videogames.



18 PORTAL 2

PC / PS3 / 360

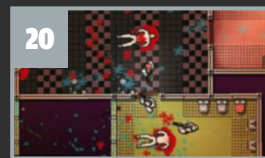
Effortlessly combines pitch-perfect puzzling with perhaps gaming's best ever comedy writing.



19 GUILD WARS 2: HEART OF THORNS

PC

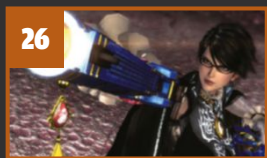
Still the benchmark for PC MMOs, and the expansion is a worthy upgrade.



20 HOTLINE MIAMI

PS4 / PC / PS3 / PS Vita / Mobile

An ultra-violent neon nightmare of blood, drugs, and sharp white suits. So fast-paced you'll get whiplash.



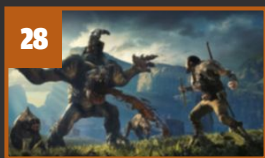
26 BAYONETTA 2

Wii U



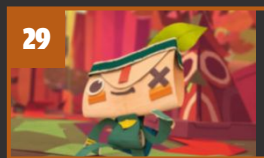
27 POKÉMON X & Y

3DS



28 MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF MORDOR

PS4 / X0 / PC / PS3 / 360



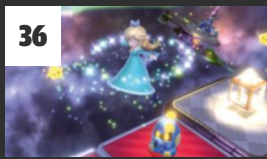
29 TEARAWAY

PS Vita



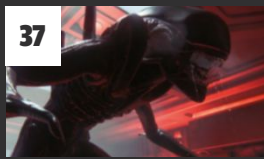
30 FAR CRY PRIMAL

PS4 / X0 / PC



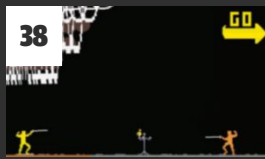
36 SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD

Wii U



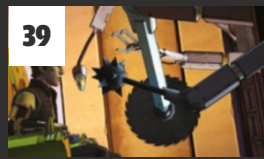
37 ALIEN ISOLATION

PS4 / X0 / PC / PS3 / 360



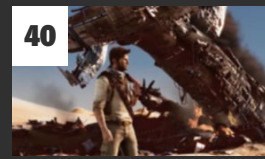
38 NIDHOGG

PS4 / PC / PS Vita



39 TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS

PS4 / X0 / PC / PS3 / 360 / Mobile



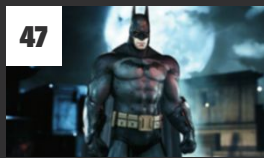
40 UNCHARTED: THE NATHAN DRAKE COLLECTION

PS4



46 FTL: FASTER THAN LIGHT

PC / Mobile



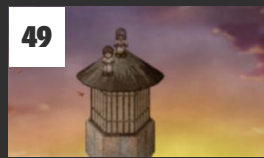
47 BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

PS4 / X0 / PC



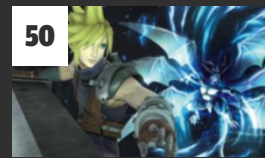
48 80 DAYS

PC / Mobile



49 TO THE MOON

PC



50 SUPER SMASH BROS FOR WII U

Wii U

PC

1 XCOM 2

2 HER STORY

3 GUILD WARS 2

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5 TOTAL WAR: ATTILA

3DS

1 FIRE EMBLEM AWAKENING

2 POKÉMON X AND Y

3 ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF

4 LUIGI'S MANSION 2: DARK MOON

5 MONSTER HUNTER 4 ULTIMATE

PS VITA

1 TEARAWAY

2 PERSONA 4 GOLDEN

3 VELOCITY 2X

4 ZERO ESCAPE: VIRTUE'S LAST REWARD

5 GRAVITY RUSH

iOS

1 80 DAYS

2 FTL: FASTER THAN LIGHT

3 SORCERY 3

4 HEARTHSTONE: HEROES OF WARCRAFT

5 PAPERS PLEASE



Because sometimes one brain isn't enough

MASTERMINDS

This month: Dishonored 2 is set to take us to the Empire Of The Isles in spectacular fashion and has us pondering: which game location would make the perfect getaway?



ou can practically feel the briny shores of Karnaka lapping at your ankles, over on the pages of this month's

super-feature. But while a trip to Dishonored 2's sunny setting might make for a nice enough break from our daily GM dootiez (did I tell you to stop checking my spelling, Robin? -Ed), we couldn't help but set out on another of our patented banter sessions...

Robin: I'd love a trip to Mass Effect's Citadel. Every luxury you could want nestled in a huge, gleaming utopia - and a great view too. A couple of weeks wandering about, chatting with aliens, eating at the galaxy's best restaurants, drinking weird booze... As long as I didn't get tangled up in some deadly conspiracy threatening all sentient life, I'd be happy as a clam, I reckon.

Ben: Pick me up some Serrice Ice Brandy if you could, Robin. Personally I'd like to travel not so much through space as time, popping down to the 19th century

London from Assassin's Creed Syndicate. Imagine it: no more weaving through selfie-taking tourists or concrete eyesores, and I could buy a nice big bag of jellied eels for a few shillings. Plus there's a chance of bumping into Charles Darwin and being all like, "I'm with you on the whole evolution thing".

Matt: Ben, London is a legitimate place you can, and do, regularly visit, minus the eels. Why not go to places where you'd never get to go in real life? Like Skyrim? Then there would at least be quest lines to accommodate you should you wake up half way across the map with no clothes on glued to a goat.

Sam: Middle-aged response incoming! Shoshone National Forest in Firewatch gets my vote. A few days in the wilderness, reconnecting with nature and escaping the rat race for a bit is my idea of heaven. Imagine the views! Dabbling in a spot of hiking, rock

climbing, photography, and getting some beers in while soaking up those picturesque views would keep me busy for a while. Might go slightly mad without human interaction though, so I'm saying a two-day maximum stay.

Robin: Camping? Wilderness? Sam, you've lost me - I didn't get this lovely

pallid complexion by faffing about in the great outdoors. I'd like to get as far away from the sun as possible with a trip to Rapture, before the whole collapse of society thing. I know it'd be a Randian nightmare full of morally bankrupt weirdos, but you can't argue a city under the sea

wouldn't be a spectacular thing to experience. I could even pick up a couple of superpowers to bring home with me - I suspect my productivity around the office would shoot up if I could fire a swarm of bees out of my arm at will.

Ben: Rapture is reserved for mankind's best and brightest, so I don't think you'd

be allowed in. No offence. Although I get that this is purely theoretical, so while you're mingling with a doomed society, I'll be adventuring across Pokémon's Kanto region, speeding in the multi-floor mall of Celadon City, speeding down its cycling routes with the wind in my hair, paying a visit to the Pewter Museum Of Science, and surfing on the back of a goldfish. I'm actually sad now that this is all impossible.

Matt: You're all having far too much fun with this. I'm gonna flip this question around. What game locations would make for the worst holiday destinations?

Robin: Both of mine would go from best to worst given time - I wouldn't want to hang around in the Mass Effect universe once the Reaper attacks start, and post-fall Rapture is just all the insane rich jerks with none of the parties. I'd have to make sure my holiday schedules were very precise...

Ben: Hell from Dante's Inferno. It's Hell.

Matt: How literal of you.



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